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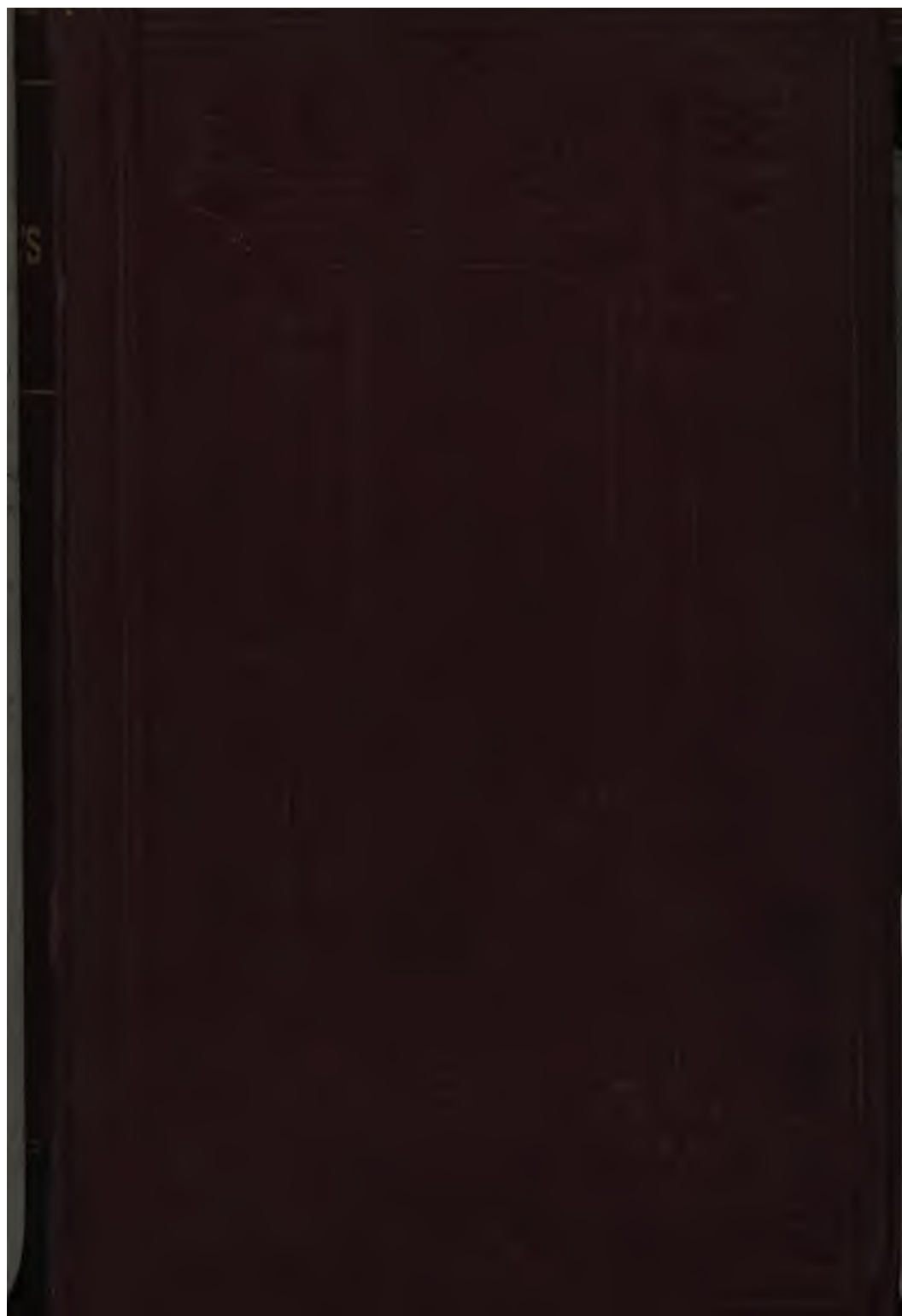
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LADY ADELAIDE'S OATH.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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LADY ADELAIDE'S OATH.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY DANE.

ON a somewhat wild part of the coast of England, between one and two hundred miles distant from the metropolis, lies a small town or village called Danesheld. The land on either side of it rises high, higher in some parts than others, and overlooks the sea, and the descent of the rocks is in places perpendicular. Not in all. There are parts where they slope back so gradually that a sure foot may descend with ease; and in these the hard nature of the rock appears to have softened with time, for grass grows upon the sides, and even wild flowers. In ancient times it was a settlement of the Danes: and there is no doubt



below; the young Danes in their boyhood, the present lord's two sons, would run up and down these steps with impunity, to get to their boat, which they kept moored underneath.

Behind the castle there is a garden—not much of one; flowers and fruit do not seem to flourish here; and, lying back between the castle and the village, may be seen the signs of husbandry—ploughed fields, grasslands, with here and there a farm-house, surrounded by its ricks and barns: all, or nearly all, belonging to Lord Dane—village, houses, lands; the various tenants paying him rent for their occupancy.

It was a sunshiny day in spring. Perched upon a gate that led into a clover-field, within view of the castle windows at the end facing Danesheld, within view also of the highroad and the green plain before it, there sat a gentleman, doing something to a fishing-rod. He looked about eight-and-twenty; a tall, slender man, with good features, though somewhat thin and sharp, and dark eyes. His velvet shooting-coat was thrown back from his shoulders, for the day was really warm; and he was whistling softly at his

work. Hearing footsteps, he lifted his eyes, and saw, advancing from the direction of the village, a middle-aged man, a stranger, who wore the attire of a gentleman-sailor. As the stranger neared the gate he lifted his glazed hat from his head; but whether in courtesy, or whether merely to wipe his brow with his handkerchief, was not clearly obvious.

"Is that Dane Castle?" asked the stranger.

"Yes."

"I thought it must be," was the comment of the sailor, spoken in an undertone. "Are the family at the castle now?"

He of the fishing-rod pointed towards the flag. "There's the sign of it. When his lordship of Dane is at home you see the flag waving there; in his absence it does not show."

"But why so?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders; his manner of speech was idle, characterized by a sort of cool equanimity almost bordering on ridicule; not ridicule of the stranger, but of the Danes he was speaking of. "Because it's one of the old Dane customs. They have some queer ones.

Those scrolls and crosses you see on the flag are the Dane arms."

"Are both the sons at home? Pardon my questions," continued the stranger; "I made acquaintance with one of them abroad, some years ago."

"The younger one is at home—the ex-captain," replied the young man, equably, as though to answer questions on the Dane family were as much his business in life just then as the splicing of the fishing-rod. "The heir is in Paris. He is a fast man, and a continental life suits him."

"Are the brothers still at variance?"

"They are. And always will be."

"Some dispute about fortune, is it not?"

"Some ill-blood; no dispute. There might be dispute if that would alter the existing state of things; but it won't. Not that the ill-blood is on the captain's side; I'll give him his due in that: the fault is the heir's."

"Is there not a young lady staying at the castle?" resumed the stranger, after a pause. "I forget her name."

"Adelaide Errol," was the answer, given with

the same coolness of tone and manner; but this time the young man lifted his eyes, and scanned the sailor. "A wild Scotch lassie, you may have heard her called, for it is what Danesheld styles her."

"I have heard her called an angel," returned the sailor; "nothing less laudatory."

"Then," and the dark eyes were fixed on the stranger as though they would read him through and through, "if you have heard that, I'll wager it was from no other than Harry Dane."

"From William Dane."

"William Henry; it is all one; we dub him Harry here. The old peer is fond of the name of Harry; my lady also; and they have rarely called him anything else."

"And the name of the elder one is Geoffry, I remember. He——"

"You'd not find the heir to Dane named anything but Geoffry," came the interruption. "Another of their superstitions."

"Indeed! Is William Dane to marry Adelaide Errol?"

The gentleman raised his eyebrows. "People say so. The captain, gallant son of Mars though

he be—or was—has singed his wings in the brightness of her fascinations. He——”

“I wish you’d talk plain English, sir,” cried the stranger, a little testily: upon which the other accorded him a prolonged stare.

“What else am I talking? Dutch?”

“Rhapsody: and it is a language I never understood. Is Captain Dane to marry the young lady, or is he not?”

“What a very unreasonable man you seem to be!” was the rejoinder, accompanied by a half laugh. “Don’t I tell you it is said he will? Captain Harry worships the very ground she treads on. You’ll call that rhapsody again, perhaps; but it is fact.”

“And she?”

The young man drew down his lips with an air that seemed to intimate it was no business of his. “How do I know? there’s no answering for women. Perhaps she returns his love; perhaps she does not. My Lady Dane impresses upon her the fact that the Honourable William Henry, although he may be getting on for middle life, is no bad match for a portionless damsel.”

"William Dane is rich," remarked the stranger.

"I wish I were a tithe as rich. Some arrangement exists in the Dane family by which the younger branches step into their fortune as soon as they are of age; and Harry, who comprised all the branches in his own person, took possession of his. It was fifty thousand pounds. To the back of that there was another fifty thousand; more—for it had been accumulating some few years—left him by his uncle William Henry Verner. And the captain can't be spending half his income. Just now, visiting at home, he is spending nothing."

"How long does he intend to remain at home?"

"You had better ask that of Adelaide Errol. When he arrived at home, he said he had come for a week or two——"

"You mean when he landed from the States?"

"I mean when he landed from the States. And what the deuce brought him wandering so long in the States has always been a mystery to me. He must have grown into a born American! He came home, saying he should remain a week

or two : that's six months ago : and he's here still, fooled by this mad passion for the— But it's no business of mine," broke off the young man. " He once talked of repurchasing into the army ; for my part I can't think why he sold out of it."

" Why do you call it a mad passion ?"

The young man took out his penknife, and leisurely scraped a spot off the fishing-rod.

" Random figures of speech slip from us at times. They frequently intend no meaning."

" I beg your pardon. That may be the Dane family."

The young man turned his head. A group had appeared on the greensward near the chapel, the most prominent object amidst it being an invalid chair, in which reclined a fine-looking old man, whose grey hair was fast turning to white. It was pushed forward by a man-servant in the Dane livery—purple velvet waistcoat and breeches, and a white coat laced with silver. A tall, fine, very handsome old lady accompanied the chair. Behind came a man of noble features, who might be approaching his fortieth year, upright and stately, slender still, and far above the middle

height. A fair girl of nineteen walked by his side—danced, rather; for now she was before him, now behind him, chattering to him, and putting forth all her attractions, as it was in her nature to do. She had a very brilliant complexion, blue eyes, and a mass of flaxen hair—a lovely vision undeniably, taken altogether; but the features were not very good, and the eyes roved about too much for true ones. Behind all, came another footman in the same livery.

“You are right,” was the answer; “it is the Dane family. They have been taking my lord for his morning airing. The two servants relieve each other in pushing the chair.”

“Is Lord Dane an invalid?”

“An invalid!” echoed the young man, as he hastily put his fishing-rod together. “It is to be hoped neither you nor I shall ever be such an one. Lord Dane had a dreadful fall with his horse last autumn, when out hunting, and has become paralyzed in the lower limbs. There’s no cure for him, the doctors say; it will only go on from bad to worse. And now, Mr. Sailor, I must wish you a good morning.”

"I thank you for your courtesy in answering my questions," said the sailor.

"Sir," rejoined the young man, in a deliberate tone, and he turned round to speak it, "I have told you nothing that you might not have heard from any man, woman, or child within the dominions of my Lord Dane. The politics of the family, so far, are patent to the world."

He sauntered away as he spoke with that indolent languor of movement we are apt to associate with the idea of a gentleman; perhaps because it belongs so exclusively to the upper classes. The sailor looked at the distant group; he had no difficulty in divining that the tall old lady must be Lady Dane; the young and pretty one Adelaide Errol. Captain Dane he knew.

At that moment another person came up, walking along the road from the direction of the village; a dark, short, thick-set man, dressed in the plain black attire of an upper servant. The sailor—as we have been calling him, though he was nothing of the sort—went forward to the road and accosted him.

"Can you tell me who that gentleman is?" he

inquired, pointing to the one with the fishing-rod.

"It is Mr. Herbert Dane."

"Not a son of Lord Dane?" cried the other, seeming puzzled.

The man threw back his head, as though the question hurt his consequence. "Oh dear, no; he is nothing but a relative. *That* is Lord Dane's son, the Honourable Captain Dane."

He was moving on, after speaking, but the sailor once more arrested him.

"Ravensbird, I think you have forgotten me."

The man turned round and stared, and then touched his hat with respect.

"Colonel Moncton! Indeed, sir, I beg your pardon. I don't think I had looked at you; I was watching the family. We often see strange sailors about here, and I took you for one."

"Tell your master I am here, Ravensbird. Stay; don't say who it is before them all. I have no time to call at the castle. Say to Captain Dane that a strange gentleman wishes to speak to him."

The servant touched his hat again and hastened forward. Herbert Dane had joined the party

then: they were just entering the castle gates. Ravensbird spoke to Captain Dane, whose servant he was, and the latter turned.

"A gentleman wants me? What gentleman, Ravensbird? Where is he?"

"Down there, sir. He wishes to see you very particularly."

Captain Dane felt annoyed, and walked away impatiently. That fair girl by his side was more to him than all the gentlemen in the world. She looked after him, and then threw her eyes—rather self-willed eyes, and not always pleasant in expression, in spite of their azure brightness—on the servant.

"Who is it, Ravensbird?"

"A stranger, my lady."

"And a Yankee," added Herbert Dane; "as I'll protest, by his accent."

They were underneath the great gateway now, and the young lady at once put her arm within Mr. Herbert Dane's, and began to pace it with him, while the servants were occupied in taking in Lord Dane. Herbert told her of the stranger's questioning curiosity; and they both laughed together.

The account given by Herbert Dane of the family was a correct one, so far as it went, and was patent, as he had observed, to the world—that is, to the world of Danesheld. Lord and Lady Dane had but two sons, no other children; and since the two grew up, had not derived much comfort from either. The heir, Geoffry, was a spendthrift, passing his time chiefly away, and when at home, making it disagreeable with his temper; but nevertheless he was the favourite, and had been indulged to excess. He was terribly envious of his younger brother; of his popularity, his good looks, and, above all, his fine income—a far larger one than *he* enjoyed, for Lord Dane had heavy expenses, and could not give him an exorbitant allowance. An enmity grew up between the brothers—"bitter blood," Danesheld called it—and there seemed little prospect but it would be lasting. The chief offender was undoubtedly Geoffry; he flung scorn and insult upon Harry; and Harry, hot-tempered, retorted in kind. Neither could there be a doubt that Harry Dane in his heart resented the love and favour lavished at home on his brother. When

Captain Dane was three-and-twenty, he accompanied his regiment to Canada: a few years' stay there, and he came home an invalid; and then he sold out. After a year or so of home sojourn, he went again to America; and from that period he had chiefly lived in the New World, travelling about to different parts of it, and paying a visit to England on rare occasions. Now his stay in the old home promised to be a longer one, for he had fallen in love with the Lady Adelaide Errol. He spoke already to her of marriage; he spoke fondly of taking her out to America afterwards, to introduce her to his friends there; and then he proposed to return to England and settle down for good. Herbert Dane was not far wrong when he said the captain worshipped the very ground she trod upon. The chief pleasure of his existence seemed that of being ever with her; and there's no doubt he imparted to her in confidence much of the history of his past life.

And the Lady Adelaide? She was one of the ⁴⁹veriest, vainest coquettes that ever set on fire the love of man: well-meaning, on the whole, but sus-

piciously heartless. People, looking fondly on her winning ways, were apt to say what a warm-natured, sweet girl she was. They were entirely mistaken : few girls were so innately selfish, though as yet she was unconscious of it. She had come to Dane Castle two years ago. The daughter of the deceased Earl of Irkdale, a very poor Scotch peer, Adelaide Errol, on the death of her mother, who was the sister of Lady Dane, found herself without a home ; for that of her brother, the wild young earl, was not a desirable one ; Lady Dane sent for her to Danesheld, and she arrived with her French maid, Sophie ; and had been turning the heads of the neighbourhood at large ever since.

Captain Dane walked quickly up to the stranger, and their hands met in a warm clasp. Colonel Moncton was an American, and they had been close friends. They corresponded yet, and it was in Captain Dane's recent letters that the colonel had read of Adelaide Errol. Nothing could exceed Captain Dane's astonishment ; he had supposed him to be safe in New York.

“Where in the world did you spring from?”

he exclaimed. "Have you taken a tour through the bowels of the earth, and come up on this side?"

Colonel Moncton laughed. "I was tempted into buying a yacht, and must needs try her at once, like a child with a new toy. The wind was fair and wafted us to England. We put in at Plymouth, and there——"

"And thence you came round to Danesheld, like the good fellow that you are!" interrupted Captain Dane, in a burst of gratification. "I heard an hour ago there was a large clipper-built yacht in the bay, sporting the stars and the stripes, but I never thought of you. I was going down to have a look at her: the passion for yachting was on myself once."

"I was about to say," continued the American, gravely, "that when we reached Plymouth I found the last mail had brought over letters for me. Dane, they are letters of recall. My wife has been seized with sudden illness, and we are putting back again with all speed."

"But you will surely stay a little time with me—at least a day or two?"

"I cannot, indeed. Pardon the seeming discourtesy, Dane. As the yacht had put in here, I would not leave without trying to see you, but——"

"Then you did not put in on purpose?" cried Captain Dane, in a tone of reproach.

"The yacht's master put in because he could not help himself. We ran foul of a stupid barge last evening, and got some slight damage: nothing to speak of—a few hours will repair it. Walk down with me and look at her."

"But you will come into the castle first, and be introduced to my family?"

"This afternoon I will," answered the American, as he linked his arm within his friend's and led him towards the village, close beyond which was situated the small bay. "You have Ravensbird with you still, I see?"

"Oh yes, he's a fixture. They don't like him at the castle: he's too independent for them. He suits me; and he is in my confidence, besides."

"Who was that bright-looking girl you were walking with, just now?"

The red rose actually dyed the captain's cheeks,

obviously as though they had been a schoolgirl's. His love was powerful within him.

"That was Adelaide Errol."

"I thought so. And when are you to take possession of her?—as we say of other things."

"It is impossible to know with any certainty," answered the captain, his lips parting with a fond smile. "She is a capricious little beauty, as capricious as your yacht, Moncton, and plays fast and loose. It will be some time this year."

"And shall you never visit the New Country again?"

"Once more; and bring her with me, I hope. I must make arrangements, you know, for having my——"

At that moment Mr. Herbert Dane overtook them, his fishing-rod still in his hand. He strolled by their side, speaking a few idle sentences, but Captain Dane did not appear to encourage him, neither did he introduce him to his friend. So Herbert Dane walked on.

"The gentleman is a relative of yours, I believe," observed Colonel Moncton.

"A cousin. His father was the Honourable

Herbert Dane, Lord Dane's brother; but the Honourable Herbert got out of his money, and has left his son and daughter nearly penniless. But for an income secured to Miss Dane, they'd not have enough to live on. I don't think it is of much consequence to Herbert in the long run; he has the same talent for spending, and would inevitably have got through all, if his father had not. A mine of gold, more or less, would be nothing to him, could he have his fling at it."

"Does he live at the castle?"

"Certainly not. I'll show you where he lives directly. The worst thing his father ever did for him was to bring him up to no profession. The Church, the Bar, the Civil Service, all are legitimate openings for a poor man of family; the Army scarcely is, because you can't get along in that without a private fortune. I'm sorry for Herbert, on the whole, though I don't like him."

Turning down a green lane on the right as he spoke, which led to three or four houses, Captain Dane halted before one of them; a small, low dwelling, covered with ivy. It was a pretty place, though little larger than a cottage;

a verdant lawn in front, with some beds of unpretending flowers.

"That's his house, and there Herbert vegetates, doing no earthly thing in life except a bit of fishing or a day's sporting. The house is his, and he and his sister live there—a fond, foolish girl, who thinks him perfection. She has three hundred a year of her own, and Herbert has about one, and so——"

What further revelations Captain Dane might have made were put a summary stop to. A young lady, with a profusion of ringlets and very pink cheeks, came running out along the garden path, burst open the little iron gate, and caught hold of his arm. She was in a thin, airy dress, and had the most childish manner in the world.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so glad to see you! I'm going away this afternoon, you know, for a week or two. You said you'd come last night and wish me good-bye."

"But I was unable to come, Cecilia.—Colonel Moncton, Miss Dane."

Miss Dane curtsied, and simpered, and blushed, and put her hands to the tips of her ringlets,

and was altogether overbashed at the sight of the stranger. But Captain Dane had no time to waste on her this morning. He wished her a pleasant visit, and walked away.

"Poor Cecilia!" he laughed, as he put his arm within his friend's. "She's a good-hearted little soul, but has not a particularly large share of brains."

They went on through the town and reached the small bay—so small as to be unavailable for large craft—where the yacht was lying. A beautiful vessel was this American yacht; she was named the Pearl, and was at the present moment the pride of Colonel Moncton's life. He was fond of fresh pastimes and fresh toys; and, being a man of good fortune, could afford to indulge his fancies.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ravensbird had entered the castle, and sought a companionship he was fond of seeking, that of Lady Adelaide's French maid, Sophie Deffloe. He was a dark, sallow-complexioned, stern-looking man, ugly at the first glance, but nevertheless the face was an honest one, and there was a kindly expression in the

penetrating black eyes. The castle wondered what pretty Sophie could see in Richard Ravensbird: but ugly men often find the greatest favour with women, as all the world knows. He had been into the town on an errand for her now, and she would only abuse him for it.

"There's your commission, Mam'selle Sophie," said he, putting on the table a small paper parcel. "I hope it's executed to your mind."

Sophie unfolded the paper and took out its contents, three or four yards of inch-wide ribbon. She was an exceedingly neat, trim damsel, dressed to perfection in her quiet attire; her features were saucy, her eyes dark grey, and her head and hair might have made the fortune of any hairdresser's window. She stamped her foot petulantly as her eyes fell on the ribbon.

"If ever I saw the like!" she exclaimed—and she spoke English with great fluency, though with a foreign accent. "I send you to buy me four yards of blue ribbon, and you bring purple! I have told you, fifty times and fifty, that you have not the eye for the colours."

Ravensbird laughed. Her grumbling was

sweeter to him than others' praise, and Made-moiselle Sophie knew that it was, and presumed accordingly. "I did my best, Sophie; won't it do?"

"Do! It must do. If I order you back you might bring grey; but don't think you are going ribbon-buying for me again.' You need not expect it."

"You sent me, Sophie."

"And if I did? Did I expect that you would be more stupid than a camel? Hand me my workbox, monsieur. It is on the table there. - Who was that sailor-gentleman you were talking with, by the swing-gate?"

Ravensbird handed the workbox, throwing his keen eyes on her as he did so. "How did you know I was talking to anyone by the swing-gate, Sophie?"

"I stand at the tower-window in my Lady Adelaide's room; I look out for you and the ribbon. 'He is taking his time,' I say to myself, 'standing there to talk.' Who was it?"

"A friend of the captain's; a gentleman we used to know in America."

"What did he talk about?" inquired Sophie, who had all the insatiable curiosity of her nation and sex.

Ravensbird laughed; he generally answered her questions with the same sort of condescending pleasure that we answer an attractive child. "He did not talk of much, Sophie. The chief thing he asked me was whether Herbert Dane was my lord's son."


"Ah," responded Sophie, "if he were my lord's son, things here might go a little smoother."

"What things?" inquired Ravensbird, opening his eyes.

"What things!" repeated Sophie, ironically. "I say to myself this long while that you and your master are the only blind ones in the castle: except, perhaps, my Lord Dane. You think my young lady has the love for your master; he thinks so. Bah!"

"What is up now?" cried Ravensbird, after a pause of astonishment.

"There is nothing up that there has not been all along," returned Sophie, with cool equanimity, "if you had but looked out to see it. My young



lady is a flirt ; she's vain ; she likes all the admiration she can get, whether it is from Captain Dane or whether it is from Squire Lester ; but in a corner of her heart there is one more precious than either. He was there a long while ; long before your master came home and put the upset to things by wanting her for himself."

"What *do* you mean ?" exclaimed Ravensbird.

"I mean that there's love between those two, Mr. Ravensbird. Have you got no wits that you should stare so?"

"Can you allude to Herbert Dane ?"

Sophie nodded as she bit off an end of cotton.

"They love each other to folly."

"Then, if so, how dare she delude my master by her false smiles?" cried Ravensbird, going into a white heat with indignation.

"She does it for a purpose," was the cool answer. "Just about the time that your master came home, my Lady Dane began to suspect that she and Mr. Herbert cared for each other, and she spoke about it, and my young lady was sick to death with fright, lest he should be sent away, or they be otherwise separated. So when Captain

Dane came forward with his grand offers, she made a show of accepting him to blind my Lady Dane; she makes a show of accepting his love to blind *him*, because she will not let the truth be known, for Mr. Herbert's sake. As to her marrying the captain, I hope my ears won't ache till that time comes."

Richard Ravensbird, standing against a side-table, felt like one who was listening to some awful plot, to a wicked conspiracy. Had the infernal machine of Fieschi been pointed at his head and brains, he could not have shrunk from it as a worse danger than the one he seemed to shrink from now. As he looked at Sophie with bewildered eyes, much of the past seemed to grow suddenly clear to him. He remembered how often he had seen the Lady Adelaide lingering with Herbert Dane; he remembered how, times and again, he had seen her exercising some little cunning ruse to avoid his master. And he had set it all down to the natural coquetry of woman.

"Do they meet in private?" he asked.

"When they can; just once in a way. She runs out now and then on a fine evening to get

a little walk with him. My lady drops asleep after dinner in the drawing-room; my lord keeps Captain Dane with him at the dinner-table; and she slips on her grey cloak, putting the hood over her head, and goes. Mr. Herbert is waiting for her, and they just take one turn across the heights by the chapel ruins, and back again. She dare not stay many minutes for fear of being missed."

"Treacherous she-serpent!" muttered Ravensbird, whose amazed ears were tingling with indignation. "Why, Sophie, it—it—it's a shocking thing for her to do! It's not respectable."

"It's not what?" shrieked Sophie. "It's not what?"

"Well, and it is not," persisted Ravensbird; "not for a young lady like her. She is engaged to my master, to Captain Dane, and she goes out with a hood over her head and meets somebody else! At any rate, it's not seemly."

"You want a hood for your head," cried Sophie, treating him to a specimen of her woman's tongue. "Is not Mr. Herbert Dane my lord's nephew, and is he not to be trusted to take care of her? She's to be trusted herself, for the matter of that, for

there never was one less likely than she to run into danger; she's giddy and thoughtless in trifles, but she's as wise as you are, mon ami, in great things. What do you fear for her?—that the sea will rise on the heights and swallow her up? If she walked out with Captain Dane, or with Mr. Lester, or with my lord himself, would you say it was 'not respectable'? Go along!"

"But look at the treachery!" cried Ravensbird. "My master is honourable, unsuspecting, as open as the day, and he ought to know of this. It's shameful treachery, I tell you, Sophie. If nobody else enlightens him, I will."

"My friend," interrupted Sophie, emphatically, "you just take my advice, for it's good—*don't you interfere*. Folks that tell unpalatable truths never get thanked. Let things have their course: when Captain Dane presses for the marriage to be fixed, as he'll do soon, then she must speak out herself, and that will be the best. Perhaps, after all, she may take him—I should, I know; at any rate she'll have to choose between them. But don't you go and break your head against a wall."

Metaphorically speaking, Mr. Richard Ravens-

bird was breaking his head against one then ; he had never felt so puzzled, so indignant, in all his life. He made no open opposition to her advice, thereby allowing her to suppose that he fell in with it.

"Herbert Dane!" he repeated, all the scorn of his nature concentrated on the name. "If she must have been false to my master, I could better have supposed it was that she loved Squire Lester."

Mademoiselle Sophie Deffloe lifted her eyebrows in pity. "That shows what you know about such things," was her retort. "Mr. Lester is twice as old as she is. What does she care for Mr. Lester? He is the handsomest man in Danesheld, and so she listens to his gallant speeches, and likes him to be her slave. If you were a gentleman she'd square her elbows at you to keep you off, because of your ugliness."

"She'd be welcome," returned Richard Ravensbird.

He was too much incensed at the duplicity practised on his master to pay heed to the shafts launched by Sophie on himself. He was deeply

attached to Captain Dane. Clenching his hand as he stood, he felt that he should like to deal out her deserts to the Lady Adelaide: a rare feeling for the generally phlegmatic Richard Ravensbird. But his nature could, on occasions, be aroused into a gust of fierce passion; and in that respect he exactly resembled his master, Captain Dane.

CHAPTER II.

KICKED DOWN STAIRS.

THE door on the left hand of the gateway of Dane Castle opened into what was called the hall; an apartment that for its spaciousness and splendour was the boast of the county. Its walls were hung with pictures, no carpet was allowed on its tessellated pavement of rich mosaic; its furniture was massive rather than elegant. In the old days, when Lord Dane was in health, and there were large dinner gatherings at the castle, this hall was used as the reception-room and the withdrawing-room. It communicated with the dining-room by folding-doors, a fine apartment also, but not of the large proportions of the hall. Both these rooms looked on to the front of the castle, facing the sea; the hall extended itself the whole depth of the castle, save for a wide stone passage that ran along behind, and into which it also opened; the dining-room had a smaller room behind it, used now for

Lord Dane's sleeping-chamber, which chamber also opened into the passage. Above were the drawing-rooms and the best bedchambers. On the other side the gateway the rooms were of less account; those to the front were not much used; the kitchens and servants' sitting-rooms were at the back. The stone passage just mentioned ran along nearly the whole length of the house—a gloomy passage at the best, and of dim light. A staircase wound up from it at either end—the one was used by the family, the other chiefly by the servants; two or three uninhabited rooms opened from it towards the back of the castle, of which one was notable, if only from its appellation—the death-room. Other passages, queer odds and ends of intricate places, abounded in the castle; some converging to an entrance-door at the back, which was kept locked by Lord Dane's orders, and the butler, Mr. Bruff, had charge of the keys, so that the only used ingress and egress was by the great gateway.

Evening came on—the evening of the day above noticed—and the party assembled in the drawing-room previous to dinner, a small party :

Lady Dane, Adelaide, and a guest, Mr. Lester. Mr. Lester—generally called Squire Lester—must have been eight or nine and thirty, but he did not look it. He was a gay, fascinating, very handsome man, of middle height, with dark hair, and eyes of a violet blue. Danesheld was beginning to say that his attraction at the castle was the Lady Adelaide—that he was hoping to win her, in spite of Harry Dane's open claims, for his second wife.

She stood against the window now, talking to him. He was bending his stately head as he listened, and his violet eyes were fixed on her with an admiration that told its own tale—a tale that Lady Adelaide was little loth to listen to; for she lived but in this species of flattery. She wore a white dress without ornaments, save that it had a bow of pink ribbon in front, enclosing a knot of pearls. A pearl necklace was round her neck, and pearl bracelets were on her arms just above the gloves. Harry Dane came in, and Mr. Lester drew a little away.

"I thought you were gone," exclaimed Lady Adelaide.

"I am later than I ought to be," he answered. "I have been looking for some papers that I want Moncton to take over for me."

"I understood your friend was to call and see us to-day, Harry," observed Lady Dane.

"He will come to-morrow instead. The skipper finds he can't get out before to-morrow evening; so it gives Moncton another day here."

"The skipper?" echoed Lady Dane. "That's one of your Americanisms, Harry."

"Indeed, no. I assure you it is native English," was the laughing answer. "Good-bye, Adelaide."

"A pleasant evening to you," she rejoined, allowing her hand to rest for an instant in his.

Just then the butler appeared and announced dinner. Captain Dane held out his arm to Adelaide.

"My tardy departure has brought me some reward at least," he said, as he led her away in the wake of Mr. Lester and Lady Dane.

"A fine reward?" she said, slightly throwing back her head with a laugh.

"A sweet reward?" he murmured in her ear. "Adelaide," came the impassioned addition, "to

have you on my arm like this, though it be but for a minute, will impart a thrill of joy to my veins for the whole evening."

Down the handsome staircase, through the spacious hall, and into the dining-room. There he left her, bowing over her hand, which he held again in his, with something of chivalrous courtesy. He was on his way to dine on board the yacht with Colonel Moncton, who had declined an invitation to the castle.

Lord Dane was already at the head of the table, seated. He was always in his place, as now, before the guests came in. A fine host still, of commanding presence. Nothing of his malady was apparent now: he enjoyed his dinner; he was full of wit and repartee—and Lord Dane had ever been a man of brilliant conversation. None, seeing him thus, could suspect he had not the full use of his lower limbs, or that he was held up by mechanical support. Lady Dane took her seat opposite to him, Mr. Lester and Adelaide on either side, and the dinner began, Bruff and two servants being in attendance.

It was a lovely night, almost as bright as day ;

and Richard Ravensbird, somewhat later in the evening, was standing at the castle gateway, enjoying the moonlight. Before him stretched the smooth, green table-land; the sea beyond it almost as smooth and calm. Standing where he did, however, he could only see the distant sea, not the waves underneath the heights. On the right were the scattered villas; further on, the village and its lights; nearly opposite him were the old chapel ruins, their glassless casements and ivied walls, broken in places, ghostly and weird-looking as the moonbeams fell on them.

Mr. Richard Ravensbird contemplated the scene to his satisfaction, and then strolled across the road, over the grass, and went inside the ruins. There was an aperture at either end, each serving for a door-way, so that you could walk right through. Grass was growing in places; the grave-stones, discernible yet, cold and grey, covered the remains of those who had for centuries been dust of the dust. Pieces of the marble flooring were left still; and traces of niches, and nooks, and miniature altars, peculiar to the places of worship of the Roman Catholics. Such relics had no

attraction for Richard Ravensbird, and he quitted the ruins and walked to the edge of the heights. In this one part the rocks were not very high—not at all formidable ; and Mr. Ravensbird looked down at the strip of land underneath, which formed the beach ; it was very narrow here, and for about two hours at high-tide was covered by the water, when it was of course impassable ; at other times preventive-men paced it—a warning to smugglers.

These preventive-men had each his marked-out beat, extending nominally a mile in length, but it was a very short one ; and their pacings were so timed (or ought to have been) that they met at the given boundary at a certain moment, exchanged the signal “All well ;” and then turned back again. Scandal-mongers said they lingered sometimes in each other’s company at these meeting-points ; had been seen to light pipes, and produce black bottles from some holes in the rocks, and altogether make themselves comfortable. The supervisor heard the rumour, and said they had better let *him* catch them at it. A sad event had occurred on the beach a week previous to this. The man on this portion of the beat sat down, as

was supposed, and fell asleep, and the tide overwhelmed him and carried him out to sea. The body was washed ashore the next day, and a subscription was now being raised for the wife and children. Lord Dane headed it with a donation of five pounds. The next sum on the list was twenty-five. It was recorded under the initial "H," and was suspected (and with truth) to be from Harry Dane, who would not openly put himself down for a larger sum than his father.

As Ravensbird stood looking down, the preventive-man on duty that night came slowly round the point, a little higher up, where the rocks projected and shut out the view beyond. Ravensbird waited until he was underneath, and then called to him.

"Is that you, Mitchel?"

The man looked up. At first he could not distinguish who was speaking.

"Don't you know me, Mitchel? It's light enough. Take care you don't go to sleep, as poor Biggs did."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Ravensbird. No, sir; I'll take care of that. We think it must have been

just about this very spot that he sat down and yielded to drowsiness, if he did yield to it. And we have been talking pretty freely among ourselves, saying what nonsense it is to make us pace this strip of beach. Why, in some places—round that point, for one—it's not a foot broad that we have to wind round! Biggs is just as likely to have slipped off, and got drowned that way, as to have dropped asleep."

"If you can make the revenue officers think it's nonsense, and take you off the duty, the smugglers will be obliged to you."

"Not at all, sir. They could move us on to the heights, and there we should be out of danger. There's not many smugglers left now-a-days."

"You must be timorous men to fancy there's danger where you are. A child might keep himself out of it."

"Being on the watch constant, perhaps he might : but one gets off the watch sometimes."

Ravensbird laughed. "Thanks to what you take to warm you on a chilly night, Mitchel."

"No, indeed, sir, you are out there. We take nothing, and dare not ; it would be as much as our

places were worth. I say, Mr. Ravensbird, don't you lean over so far! You might be attacked with giddiness."

"Not I;" answered Ravensbird. "I like looking over heights; my nerves are steady."

"It's more than I like," was the answer. "And that would be a nasty fall; it would be sure to break limbs, and it might take life. Good night, sir."

"I don't covet the fall. Good night, if you are progressing onwards. I suppose the tide will soon be up."

The preventive-man passed on, and Richard Ravensbird strolled back to the ruins. Barely had he entered them, when he saw some one approaching from the direction of Danesheld, and recognised Herbert Dane.

"Then Sophie was right!" he exclaimed. And up to that very moment there had been a grain of welcome doubt in the man's mind.

Mr. Dane advanced, whistling; he put his back against one of the ivy-covered window-frames, and looked out in the direction of the castle. Leaning against the ruins in this manner,

there was no fear of his being discovered by any stray passers in the road.

She came up presently, enveloped in her overcloak, her feet swift. Herbert Dane hastened forward to meet her; and Mr. Ravensbird, safely ensconced inside the ruins, called down something that was not a blessing on all treachery. Herbert Dane took her on his arm, and they walked quickly through the chapel to the open ground beyond it—ran, indeed, for the young lady seemed impatient. Mr. Ravensbird hid himself in the darkest nook, as they passed, and then gingerly followed them, and peeped out as they paced about between the chapel and the heights, she clinging lovingly to his arm.

“Is the gallant captain at home this evening?” Ravensbird heard him ask.

“No, he is gone on board the American’s yacht. Squire Lester is dining with us. Oh, Herbert,” she added, with a gay laugh, “I think, what with one admirer and another, my head will be turned. He, the squire, is growing more demonstrative.”

“Squire Lester’s nobody, Adelaide. The only one to be feared is nearer home.”


"You need not fear," she impulsively answered. "I hate him! I despise him! He may be one that men esteem and women admire, but he has set his unwelcome love upon me, and therefore I hate him!"

"He is the Honourable Harry Dane, and his purse is weighty," remarked Herbert with bitterness. "No despicable rival."

"If you begin like that I shall go back again," she returned, with an affectation of pretty childishness. "You know that he is nothing to me; that I shall never marry him, though I am obliged to let it be thought I will. Why he—but I must not tell that; I gave my promise. Do you fear I would marry him, Herbert, when I—I care only for you?"

"What is it that you may not tell?" inquired Herbert Dane.

"Oh, nothing; only something he said," she answered, carelessly; "it does not concern either you or me. You are cross with me, Herbert: you think I ought not to encourage him, but where's the help for it? If my aunt suspected I cared for you, or you for me, we should be sent flying to opposite corners of the earth."



"Adelaide, this deception cannot go on for ever ; an explanation must come."

"I suppose it must, sometime."

"And when it does?"

"Now, please don't worry about the future, Herbert! When it does come, I daresay I shall manage some way. Do you know what idea floats sometimes through my mind—that I will tell Harry the truth, how we love each other, and throw myself on his generosity, and get him to keep the secret."

"Don't talk nonsense, Adelaide."

"Why are you so cross to-night?"

"I am not cross, only pained. My life seems like one long dream of pain now. At odd moments I think you do not really care for me."

The accusation was unfounded, and Adelaide Errol looked up at him in reproach, her eyes filling with tears that were conspicuous in the moonlight. He murmured a word of contrition, bent down, and pressed a kiss upon her lips. Mr. Richard Ravensbird, in his hiding-place, rather wished that it had been a blister instead.

For a few minutes Ravensbird heard no more ;

they were standing side by side on the brow of the heights, looking out on the sea. Then Lady Adelaide seemed to turn in a hurry.

"No, don't write to me," she was saying, when they came within Ravensbird's hearing again; "we must chance it. I am not sure that it would do to entrust notes to Sophie: she and that ugly servant of Harry's, who is as dark as his name, are great friends. It's a shame you can't run in and out of the castle at will, as you used to do; but it's true what you say—that they all look cool upon you. I must go, indeed, Herbert: suppose my aunt were to wake up and get to know I was here! The fuss there'd be!"

"Where's the harm?" hotly returned Herbert Dane. "You are as safe with me, I hope, as you are indoors with her."

"But you are the very one she does not choose me to be with, don't you see?" said the girl with a laugh. "She'd think there was treason concocting against Harry. Is Cecilia gone on her visit?"

"She went this afternoon. You are in a hurry to go!" he said, speaking as if excessively aggrieved. "It's not often you come out here, goodness knows.

And I have told you I cannot be here to-morrow night."

"It's not often we get these lovely nights. You would not have me come out on a dark or a wet one. Not through the chapel, Herbert," she added, for he seemed bearing towards the entrance-door. "I never go through it but I think of ghosts. You must have an affection for them."

He laughed; and Ravensbird watched them slowly pass outside, getting a clear view of their features through the apertures of the ivied casements.

Herbert Dane did not go far; he was afraid, possibly, of being seen. They stood a moment to shake hands; she ran swiftly away over the turf, and he came back and propped his back against the wall, as before, while he watched her enter the castle. Then he took his way towards Danesheld at a swift pace; and Mr. Richard Ravensbird, emerging from the sheltering ruins, cooled his heels and his indignation by a walk on the heights before he returned home.

The morning rose as lovely as the night had been; not quite so calm, for a slight breeze ap-

peared to be getting up. "All the better for Moncton's yacht," observed Captain Harry Dane, as he sat at breakfast with his mother and Lady Adelaide, the sunbeams falling aslant on the table, causing the white cloth and the silver to glitter. "The wind is fair, too, for her; she'll go out with a run."

"When does she go out?" asked Lady Dane.

"To-night."

"You stayed late on board last night, Harry, did you not?"

"Yes. I think it was past twelve when I quitted her. I and Moncton were talking of old times. He is anticipating the pleasure of welcoming you sometime to his home, Adelaide; he has a charming place at Washington."

Lady Adelaide threw back her head to speak, and there was incipient defiance in her tone.

"It may be that he will not get the pleasure. Washington is a long way off, Captain Dane."

"Captain Dane!" he echoed, not pleased at the title.

"Harry, then," she rejoined, good-humouredly, for Lady Dane was turning upon her a dis-

approving eye; "if you are ashamed of the other name."

"I am not ashamed of it, Adelaide," he quietly said; "but I like a different one from you."

"Oh dear!" sighed Adelaide, petulantly throwing herself back in her chair; "how crooked and contrary things go in this world!"

"What things go crooked and contrary?" inquired Lady Dane.

"Lots of things, aunt. Sophie was as cross as two sticks this morning, and that beautiful bird Mr. Lester gave me is drooping its wings. I think it is going to die."

As Captain Dane quitted the room after breakfast, he was met by his servant Ravensbird, who craved five minutes' speech of him. They ascended to a small apartment in the turret that the captain made his sitting-room, and were shut in. Lady Dane ordered the breakfast things away, and opened her prayer-book to read the psalms for the day. She was a thoroughly good woman. When Adelaide Errol first came, her aunt had caused her to join in the exercise; but it had been done with an ill grace, an impatient manner; and Lady Dane

at length told her, gently, to wait until her heart was more attuned to it. Poor Adelaide, who had never been trained in such habits, thought them a weary task, a waste of time ; and Lady Dane had the good sense to remember that none should be forced into religion. She sat in her easy-chair near the fire ; Adelaide, in her pretty muslin dress of peach-colour, her fair hands peeping from beneath its open cuffs of lace, her cheeks as pink as the muslin with some inward excitement, stood at the window.

The room was near the drawing-room, at the end of the house ; one window facing the sea, another overlooking Danesheld. It was a glorious spring morning, The sky was blue, with a few fleecy clouds upon it ; the sun was brilliantly shining ; the hedges were putting forth their tender green, and the early flowers were opening. Not at any of these, pleasant objects though they were to the eye, gazed Lady Adelaide : the genial sun, the azure sky, the green hedges of promise, the smiling flowers, were as nothing to her ; she did not cast a thought to the beautiful expanse of sea stretched out in the distance, or to its stately ves-

sels sailing slowly along, their white sails sparkling in the sunshine; she saw nothing of the pretty villas near, or of the labourers at work on the farm lands: no, her attention was absorbed by something else.

Astride upon the same gate where you saw him yesterday, sat Herbert Dane. He might be seen there often, for it was within view of the one window of the morning-room, and of a charming young face that was wont to appear at it. He had discarded the fishing-rod of yesterday, but he held instead a silver-mounted riding-whip, with which he switched, now his own boots, now the bars of the gate, all in his usual listless fashion. Think you the Lady Adelaide could have eyes for other sights when he was there? He took off his hat to her once when she first appeared; and a stranger would have seen nothing in the action beyond the ordinary courtesy of a gentleman. She probably saw much more.

"Aunt," she cried, suddenly breaking the silence, and it seemed, to her impatience, that half an hour at least must have elapsed since Lady Dane had held her prayer-book, though in reality it was

barely ten minutes, "is it not time, think you, to get ready to go out with my uncle?"

"Not yet, Adelaide. It is only——What's that?"

Loud and angry tones, as of voices in dispute, arose suddenly from the floor above. Lady Dane started from her chair in alarm, and Adelaide ran to the door and pulled it open.

Captain Dane and his servant Ravensbird were on the stairs; the captain had hold of his servant's collar, and was propelling him before him in fierce passion. Both of them seemed in a state of uncontrollable rage, of ungovernable fury. They stumbled down to this, the first landing, and then Captain Dane, with a push and a kick, sent his servant whirling along the lower staircase.

Lady Dane, utterly aghast, gazed over the balustrades at Ravensbird. The man righted himself, looked up, and shook his fist at his master. But he seemed not to see the ladies.

"Take care of yourself, Captain Dane," he said, the words coming forth in a malignant, hissing tone. "I shall never lose sight of this insult until I have repaid it."

"Good heavens, Harry!" exclaimed Lady Dane, as Ravensbird disappeared amid a knot of gaping servants, whom the noise had caused to gather below, "what does all this mean? What has Ravensbird done?"

"Never mind, mother. He will not disturb the peace of the castle again. I have discharged him."

"Discharged Ravensbird?"

"The wicked hound!" burst forth the captain, who could not in the least get over his fury.

"But what had he done?" reiterated Lady Dane.

"He attempted to impose on me with lying tales, and when I would have forced from him his motive for the villany, he—— But there, I can't go over the matter; I shall kill him if I do," broke off the captain.

And turning round, he stalked back to his room again, leaving Lady Dane and Adelaide to any conjectures they might please to form.

Mr. Richard Ravensbird, vouchsafing as little explanation as his master, strode past the wondering servants in the small stone hall, which must not be confounded with the great hall before-

mentioned, and down the stone passage. He never spoke a word; his face was livid; his nostrils were working. Only as he was turning towards the gateway did he look back, and ask one of the footmen to gather his clothes and other property together, and despatch them after him to the "Sailors' Rest." At this juncture Sophie appeared on the scene, demanding an explanation; but Ravensbird waived her off. With the persistency of her sex she laid hold of him, and then Ravensbird said she should hear from him in the course of the day, as he shook himself free. Nothing more could she obtain from him, though she followed him beyond the great gates, and stood there until he was out of sight.

Herbert Dane was still astride on the swing gate, nearly tired, it must be supposed, with the switching of his boots and legs. The appearance of Mr. Ravensbird, with so peculiarly enraged an expression of face, was a welcome divertissement.

"Halloa, Ravensbird! What's up?"

The man stopped as he answered, looking into the face of his questioner, and giving each word its full force—

"I have been kicked out of the castle, sir."

"Kicked out of the castle!" echoed Herbert Dane, in astonishment. "By whom? Not by its lord?" he added, with an attempt at a joke.

"I have been ignominiously thrust forth from the castle and from my long service; kicked down stairs in the sight of my Lady Dane and of the domestics," repeated Ravensbird. "He who did it was my master. But let him look to himself, for I swear I'll be revenged. There are some insults, sir, that retaliation alone can wipe out. This is one."

"And what was it all for? How did you offend him?" reiterated the wondering listener.

"I was endeavouring to do him a service; and my friendly words—friendly I meant them to be—were taken up in a wrong light. I say, let him take heed to himself."

Ravensbird strode on, waiting for no more. Herbert Dane gazed after him, unable all at once to recover his surprise. The silver-mounted riding-whip was still now.

"A queer customer to offend, he looks at the present moment," quoth he to himself. "What a

livid face of anger it was! I think Mr. Harry *had* better take heed to himself."

Meanwhile, Lord Dane, to whose ears the scandalous sounds had penetrated, summoned his son to his presence, and demanded an explanation. But Captain Dane wholly declined to enter into details. "Ravensbird had behaved infamously, and had received his deserts," he said; and nothing more could his lordship get from him.

Colonel Moncton called in the course of the morning, and remained to luncheon. The Pearl was ready to go out now, and was waiting for the evening's tide. Lord Dane inquired what time she would sail, and the colonel replied he believed they should get away by about nine o'clock. He asked Captain Dane to dine with him on board at seven, and the captain promised to do so.

The two friends went out together after luncheon; and Lady Adelaide, standing in listlessness at the drawing-room window, watched them as they strolled about. Captain Dane was showing his friend the few points of interest within view. He took him inside the chapel ruins; he showed him the steps of descent a little higher up, with the

small landing-place below, where he and his brother used to moor their pleasure-boat. They descended these steps now, and continued their way to the village along the narrow path chiefly used by the preventive-men, parting when they reached the yacht, for Captain Dane pleaded an afternoon engagement.

And the day passed on to evening.

There was no dinner-guest that night at the castle. Lord Dane, his wife, and Adelaide, were seated at the table, when, somewhat to their surprise, for they had heard the promise given to Colonel Moncton, Captain Dane entered and took his place.

"Is it you, Harry?" cried Lord Dane. "I thought you were dining on board the yacht."

"I changed my mind afterwards, sir, and sent a message to Moncton. Perhaps I may go down to see him off."

The words were spoken in a short, odd tone. Lord Dane saw that his son was suffering from inward annoyance.

"You are allowing that affair with Ravensbird to vex you, Harry," he said, looking at him.

"It has vexed me very much indeed, sir; more than I care to speak of."

"Harry, you must take care of that man," spoke up Adelaide, who was this night attired in a blue silk, shot with white, that shone and glimmered in the gaslight. "I hear he meditates some vengeance upon you."

Harry Dane's only answer was to draw down his lips in contempt for Mr. Ravensbird and his vengeance; but Lord Dane inquired of Adelaide where she picked up that piece of news.

"I happened to meet Mr. Herbert when I was out this afternoon," she said; and anybody hearing her answer, and seeing the demure, composed expression of face, might have deemed Mr. Herbert some remote elderly connection whom she hardly presumed to speak to, or to know by sight. "He said Ravensbird passed by him on leaving the castle this morning, vowing he would be revenged; and he thought Harry had better have such a man for a friend than an enemy."

A smile of irony, mingled with almost implacable anger, crossed the face of Captain Dane. "Let Ravensbird be left to me," was all he said;

and after that, throughout the dinner, he spoke only in monosyllables, and. Lord Dane noticed that he sent nearly everything away untouched.

CHAPTER III.

THE FALL FROM THE CLIFF.

"SHALL I go, or shall I not?" debated Lady Adelaide, as she stood in weary patience at one of the windows of the drawing-room, looking out between the muslin curtains at the lovely night. "Herbert said he could not come up to-night, and that's a great shame. Tiresome people! And such a night as it is! I think I *must* go," she added, after a pause. "I don't know what it is that makes me like this freedom of running out alone, all independent, unless it is that they taught me to be free and self-dependent as a child. How bright the moonlight is as it glistens on the water! I'll go for five minutes. I think my lungs are exacting lungs, and require some fresh air after the heat and gas of the dining-room."

She turned and looked at Lady Dane. Yes, there was no impediment there; for her ladyship was fast asleep in her easy-chair. It was, indeed,

a most charming night—the sea calm, the air genial, the moon bright as day. The promised breeze of the morning had subsided into a gentle one, just sufficient to carry out the fishing-craft and Colonel Moncton's yacht. Adelaide Errol quitted the room on tiptoe, put on her grey cloak with its sheltering hood, and stole forth through the great gateway. Had any one preached to her of imprudence touching these short moonlight excursions, she would have laughed in their faces, and said she was as secure from harm out of doors as in. Perhaps she was; for a cry might have brought forth the whole castle to her rescue.

Lady Dane slept on—the more soundly, perhaps, because she had been longer than usual to-night dropping off, to the secret annoyance of her impatient niece. Could she but have discerned the young lady at that very moment, tripping with light steps of unconcern over the grass! Lady Dane had been greatly put out with the chief event of the day—the quarrel with Ravensbird. Harry had never been her favourite son—but he was her son; and any grief or annoyance to him found its echo tenfold in her breast. Ah! if

these careless sons did but know the pain they bring!

Suddenly, as it seemed, Lady Dane began to dream. She thought the encounter was being renewed—that Harry had seized hold of Ravensbird and was striking him in the face, causing the man to utter a succession of screams. So vivid was the scene that Lady Dane awoke.

She awoke to find that the screams were real. She sat up in her chair, bewildered for a moment, and wondering what was the matter and where everybody was. But the screams were not those of Ravensbird; they were the shrill screams of a woman, and they came from the greensward outside. Lady Dane went to the window, threw it open, and looked out. A grey object was flying over the grass towards the castle. Not at first did Lady Dane recognise it, though the hood was flung back from the fair young face, and the elaborately-dressed hair was all distinct in the moonlight; not at first did she recognise the screams. Then she saw Bruff, followed by other of the servants, run across the road, and the young lady, with her piercing shrieks, fell into

their arms. Lady Dane clasped her hands together in an impulse of astonishment mingled with fear. It was her niece, Adelaide!

She went down stairs, as quickly as her age allowed, into the great hall, and met Bruff bringing in Lady Adelaide. Panting, trembling, crying still, unable to support herself, the girl was evidently under the influence of some awful fear, some great terror. Lady Dane's questions were utterly useless, for Adelaide was not in a state to answer. She fell into a chair in a fit of strong hysterics, and her cries might have been heard half way to Danesheld. The wondering servants took her cloak off; they ran for smelling-salts, for water; Lady Dane chafed her hands, and altogether there was a great commotion; in the midst of which the stentorian voice of Lord Dane was heard, calling out for Bruff. The man hastened into the dining-room, and Lord Dane, who sat at the head of the table still, the bell-rope attached to his chair, by means of a silken ribbon, angrily inquired what all that unseemly noise meant.

"My lord, the cries are from Lady Adelaide. She seems to be taken ill."

"*Seems* to be taken ill! What d'ye mean?"

"She was outside, as it appears, my lord. She was running home from the heights and screaming, when we got out. Something must have frightened her."

"Lady Adelaide shrieking like that! Lady Adelaide out on the heights at this hour!" reiterated Lord Dane, in angry disbelief. "It's not likely, Bruff."

But, my lord, it *is* so," persisted Bruff. "Those hysterical cries you hear now are Lady Adelaide's. She is in the hall, and my lady's with her."

"Undo this," said Lord Dane.

He alluded to the silken ribbon attached to his chair. The butler obeyed; and Lord Dane, touching a spring of the chair, propelled it gently forward over the carpet. It was one of those chairs that make the comfort of helpless invalids, enabling them to move without assistance from one part of the room to another. Bruff threw open the folding-doors, and Lord Dane went on to the hall, causing his chair to halt in front of Adelaide. Hysterics are not so uncontrollable as some people

imagine; and the sight of Lord Dane stopped these. But Lady Adelaide trembled all over, as if in a fit of the ague, and her face was white as death.

"What is all this, Adelaide?" he inquired. "Have you been frightened? What is it?" he added, rather sharply, turning to his wife, for Adelaide suddenly flung her hands on her face as if denying an answer. "Bruff says she was out on the heights, and came shrieking home again. I don't understand it."

"I'm sure I don't," returned Lady Dane. "It's true she was on the heights, for I saw and heard her. She must have been frightened in some way."

"But what brought her on the heights?"

"That is just what I want to learn. When I fell asleep after dinner she was in the drawing-room, reading. It seemed to me that barely five minutes had elapsed, when she came back from the heights crying in the way you must have heard. I have asked her ten times what took her out; but she does not answer."

Lady Dane was cross also. She thought the young lady might answer if she would.

Lord Dane, choleric as ever was his second son, and unused to contradiction, wheeled his chair a foot closer, and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Some of the servants were standing round, but he was unmindful of them.

"Now look you here, Adelaide, this won't do. I want to know what it is that is the matter with you, and I will know. What took you out?"

"I don't know," she answered, shivering visibly in her strong emotion.

"But you must know; you did not walk out in your sleep. Adelaide, understand me—I am asking *to know*. Did you go out to meet anybody?" he continued, a shrewd suspicion arising in his mind.

"Oh no, no; indeed I did not; indeed, Lord Dane, I did not," she replied, with what seemed very unnecessary vehemence.

"I thought it possible you might have gone out in expectation of meeting Harry, or with him. Very foolish of you both if you had, when you can walk out together as much as you choose in the daytime. But Harry went to the yacht, I think. Your explanation, Adelaide?"

"I'll tell the truth," she said, with a flood of

more silent tears. "I stood at the window after my aunt went to sleep, looking out on the lovely night. I never saw a night more beautiful, and it came into my head that I would run across the heights and back' again, and I put on my grey cloak and went. I meant no harm."

"And a very wild-goose trick it was!" interposed Lady Dane. "Young ladies don't run out alone at night in this country, Adelaide, however bright the moon may be."

Adelaide did not care for the reproof; her aunt might reproach her with being a "wild-goose" for ever if she pleased; what she did care for, was the penetrating look of my Lord Dane, whose keen eyes were fixed on her face.

"You have not told us what alarmed you," he quietly said.

"And I don't know what alarmed me; I don't, indeed, uncle. I was so foolish as to think, in a spirit of bravado, that I'd run through the chapel ruins, but no sooner was I in them than a horrible fear came over me, and I ran home screaming. I could not have helped screaming had it been to save my life."

"Poor child!" spoke Lady Dane in compassion.

"I can't bear the ruins even in the daytime," she resumed, with a shudder; "and at night they seem full of nothing but ghosts. Oh, aunt! I'll never run out alone again."

Lord Dane felt unconvinced. As to ghosts, he had hitherto believed the young lady to be one who was no more amenable to such fear than he himself was.

"Adelaide," he gravely said, "did anything else frighten you? Did any one accost you on the heights?"

"Not any one, indeed," she answered, earnestly; "no person whatever saw me or knew I was there. No one ever is on the heights at night."

"Had a mad bull strayed on them?" cried his lordship, in an access of anger. "Nothing less than a raging animal of some sort ought to call up such senseless terror as this."

"Poor child!" again whispered Lady Dane in her increased compassion, fully believing every word her niece had said. "She has told us the truth, I am sure, Geoffry. Don't you remember how frightened I used to be of ghosts myself when

I was young ; how I would fly by the death-room with my face hid, if ever I had to pass it, and how you used to laugh at me?"

"There, dry your tears," cried Lord Dane, accepting the position, though there was still a corner of incredulity in his heart. "You had better come into the dining-room and drink a glass of wine. And don't you go running out again at night, lest you meet real ghosts instead of fancied ones."

Lord Dane touched his chair and went slowly away, Bruff lifting it over the edge of the dining-room carpet at the folding-doors. Lady Dane followed. Adelaide was rising from her seat, passively obedient—as she would have been at that moment had Lord Dane invited her to a glass of opium in lieu of wine—when her glance happened to fall on her maid. The French girl's eyes were fixed upon her with so strange a gaze that Lady Adelaide recoiled in a second attack of terror.

"What is it, Sophie?" she gasped.

"Nothing, my lady. I have no fear of those revenants for my part. I did not think your ladyship had."

But the tone of the words was curiously bold ; almost covertly insolent. And the Lady Adelaide, instead of checking the freedom, looked as if she could have fallen at the maid's feet and implored her to be silent.

It was about this same hour, or a short while before it, that Mitchel, the coastguardsman, came winding round the point, on his beat, near Dane Castle; just as on the previous night, when he had been called to from the heights by Richard Ravensbird.

He came gingerly round the point—the rocks projected so much just there as scarcely to leave a foot wide of beach to walk upon—his monotonous steps a shade quicker, it might be, than usual, for this was his last turn ere the tide should come up ; and Mitchel, never a strong man, was always yearning for the time of rest. His thoughts reverted to the great event of the day—the dispute between Ravensbird and his master—and which had become known all over Danesheld an hour after it had taken place. It is possible that the recollection of the colloquy with Ravensbird the previous evening, on that same spot,

brought the subject of the quarrel to his mind then.

Suddenly, before the point was well rounded, a sound of angry voices arose in the still night air. They seemed to come from the heights, in the direction of the chapel-ruins, just where Ravensbird had been the past night; and Mitchel naturally looked up. He could see nothing—the rocks rose too perpendicularly; but in another minute two men—as they looked to him, in the moonlight—appeared on the very edge of the heights, engaged in a sharp scuffle. The voices had ceased then: the struggle seemed to be for dear life: and Mitchel, full of horror at the danger, stood still and gazed.

An instant of suspense for the man—it was not longer—and one of them fell over the cliff, or was propelled over; immediately following upon which, some shrill cries of terror, evidently not in the voice of a man, arose faintly beyond, in the distance.

Mitchel stood in dismay; in fear: his heart leaping, as the saying runs, into his mouth. As may have been gathered from the above alluded-

to short conversation with Ravensbird, he was not of a brave nature; few men permanently weak in constitution are so. Mitchel managed to keep up and go about his duties, but he was always ailing, and earlier in life he had been subject to epileptic fits. He had really to take heart and courage before he could advance; the sight of a dead man to Mitchel would have been as bad as that of a ghost to a schoolgirl, and he had little doubt that the unfortunate victim before him was dead—killed by the fall. In breathless trepidation he at length ran along the beach to the spot, and stooped over the man, lying there.

Dead, he appeared to be. The face was upturned in the bright night, the eyes were closed, the mouth was slightly open, and the skin wore a blue and ghastly look in the moonlight. Mitchel recognized the features, and recoiled as he did so; if anything could have augmented his terror and dismay at the moment, it was that recognition: for they were the features of the Honourable William Henry Dane.

The first thought that came into the coast-guard's brain was, that the other must have

been Ravensbird; the second was to wonder what he should do. He was in ignorant bewilderment of what he ought to do; or indeed of what he *could* do. Impulse led him to lift his head and shout out, hoping he might be heard on the heights; but there came no answer. Little chance was there that the assailant would respond; and nobody else was likely to be abroad there at night.

The faint cries—shrill in themselves but faint in the distance—had soon died away, and Mitchel began half to doubt whether he had really heard any. Mitchel took off his own coat, folded it, and laid it under Captain Dane's head; he rubbed his hands, he sprinkled water from the sea on his face, and he rubbed his heart.

But Captain Dane never moved, or gave the faintest sign of life. Not a vessel happened to be within hail at the time, or Mitchel in his desperation would have shouted to that. Again he raised his voice to the heights—a poor voice at the best of times, not as strong as most men's—but the echoes died away into silence, and there was no answer. Suddenly he was seized with a panic of terror—partly at finding himself

helplessly alone with the dead, partly at the recollection that the tide would soon be up and overwhelm the body, partly at the horror of the situation altogether.

Mitchel was one of those who become hopelessly incapable on a sudden emergency; he knew no more than a child what was best to be done. The nearest way off the beach was round the point he had just traversed, and up the steps a very little higher up; the same steps which poor Captain Dane descended in the morning with his friend, the American gentleman. It would have been Mitchel's proper course to take, for he could soon have obtained assistance at the castle. But, Mitchel argued, if he ran along the beach the opposite way, towards Danesheld, he should meet, almost immediately, the next preventive-man, the boundary-point not being far distant. Two vague ideas were floating hazily into Mitchel's mind, prompting him to the latter course; the one was, that it would be awfully lonely to go by way of the steps and across the heights, certain not to meet a soul; the other was, that he could bring back his comrade, the

preventive-man, and between them they might manage to bear Captain Dane's body from the rising sea.

Standing in lamentable indecision, his brain confused, his mind perplexed, Mitchel stooped again over Captain Dane. The face had not been injured in falling. He pushed the hair from the cold brow; he took up one of the hands, intending to feel for the pulse, but in his tremor he let the hand slip, and it fell a dead weight. Mitchel's panic came on again with twofold violence, and the man, hardly knowing what he did, tore away at a break-neck speed, his heart beating in wild thumps against his side. You need not ask which way he went; in these moments of terror, reason yields to impulse: and Mitchel's face and steps were turned towards Danesheld, his eyes on the strain for the welcome view of his comrade.

But he did not meet him. Whether the man had stolen a march upon time (as was most likely), and gone away too early; or whether (as he afterwards declared) he was perched upon a ledge that was partly sheltered in the rocks,

looking at what he called a "suspicious craft" lying off the coast, never was satisfactorily settled. Certain it was, the two men did not meet, did not see each other, and Mitchel went tearing along all the way to Danesheld, the thumping of his heart getting louder, and now and then impeding his progress, in a manner that Mitchel scarcely liked, and did not understand.

The first place he came to was the coast-guard station—a low building close to the beach. Outside, it looked just like a barn; inside, it consisted of two rooms and a sleeping closet. As Mitchel neared it, he was conscious of a sense of great relief from two causes: that he was within hail of living beings again, and that there would yet be time to rescue the body of Captain Dane.

The outer door of the station opened into a good-sized room. In this, round a blazing fire, were gathered four men, comfortably gossiping as they sat: the supervisor, whose name was Cotton, two friends who had dropped in, and a preventive-man. This coastguard station, having little to do with its time, possessed the character

for keeping up any scandal there might be current in Danesheld. It was some time since a dish had been served up to it equal to the one afforded them that day—the kicking down-stairs by Captain Dane of his servant, and the thrusting him from the castle. Nothing else had been talked of in Danesheld since the morning, and it formed the topic of conversation now in the station as the men sat round the fire, each one of the four offering his own conviction as to the origin, or cause, in contradiction to the rest. Exceedingly astonished were the disputants to find the door burst open with a bang, and a coatless man come bolt in upon them with a sort of shrill howl. They recognised him for Mitchel: his hair was standing on end, his eyes seemed starting from his head, and his face was in a white heat.

“What on earth’s the matter with you?” wrathfully demanded Mr. Supervisor Cotton, who came to the conclusion that Mitchel had been drinking.

Mitchel could not answer, except for a few more semi-screams, the result of his endeavours

to get his breath. His heart was beating as he never remembered it to have beaten before, even when he used to have fits, and it did at times beat awfully then. He laid his two hands upon it, and staggered against the wall; his lips were turning white, great drops of water were coming out on his brow. Mr. Cotton began to doubt whether there might not be some other cause for these strange appearances than the one he had hastily assumed.

"Why have you left your beat? What brings you here in this state? Where's your coat?" he reiterated in wondering wrath, finding Mitchel did not speak.

"He is dead; he is dead!" gasped Mitchel, at length. "I must have assistance for him. If—"

Mitchel did not go on; apparently his breath would not let him, or perhaps his heart. Mr. Cotton stared, and his friends stared.

"Who is dead? what are you talking of?" cried the supervisor.

Mitchel opened his lips to answer—if that's not a figure of speech, seeing his gasping state had not allowed them to be closed—but no words

came forth, and he suddenly threw up his hands. But for their springing forward and catching him, he had fallen to the ground.

“What has he got?” cried Mr. Supervisor Cotton. “He looks as if he was in a fit. Lay him down here; and, Sims, you go for the doctor.”

Mitchel was in a fit. The fright he had experienced on the beach, or the prolonged and violent exertion of running, perhaps the two combined, had brought on a fit similar to those he used to be subject to in early life.

CHAPTER IV.

RAVENSBIIRD'S ARREST.

THEY were gathered together in the coastguard station, their faces bent over the prostrate man, Mitchel; the doctor present now, and Mr. Supervisor Cotton himself holding the light. Sims, the preventive-man, despatched in search of the surgeon, had not been able to find him immediately; he met him at length in the town, walking arm-in-arm with Mr. Apperly, Lord Dane's solicitor; but some time had been lost then. Sims told of Mitchel's attack, which he called "queer," and the two gentlemen turned their steps to the station. Mitchel was insensible still, and frothing at the mouth.

"Just move away, will you, and give elbow-room," said the doctor, whose name was Wild, to the crowding spectators. "Do you know what brought this attack on, Mr. Cotton? I suspect the man must have been unduly excited."

"He came banging in here in a fine state without his coat," was Mr. Cotton's answer. "I never saw a man so upset: all his breath was gone; and his speech too. I thought he was drunk!"

The doctor, a thin, active man, with curly black hair, made no observation. He was busying himself with Mitchel. The supervisor resumed:

"After an effort, Mitchel got out some words about wanting assistance for somebody who was dead; so far as we could understand them. For my part, Mr. Wild, I think he was moonstruck."

"I don't, sir," dissented Sims, turning to his superior: "I think he must have had a great fright. Mitchel's a quiet, steady man, not given to drink, or anything of that sort, but he's a regular coward."

The only way of arriving at a solution of the mystery was to wait until Mitchel himself revived to tell it. Mr. Wild remained with the man, and he grew better, but it was nearly an hour before he was able to speak. They placed him in a chair in front of the fire, and gave him something to drink.

"Now, Mitchel," began the doctor, "let us have it out. What caused this attack of yours?"

Mitchel did not answer. He was probably diving into his memory for the various items of the evening.

"What's the hour?" he suddenly asked, attempting to spring up, so as to get a view of the clock behind him.

"Hard upon ten. You'd better sit still, Mitchel."

But instead of sitting still, Mitchel staggered a few paces forward, and had to sink back again. He was weak yet.

"Then it's too late!" he exclaimed in his excitement. "The body will have been already washed away!"

He told the tale as well as he was able; his sentences were disjointed yet. That there had been a scuffle on the brow of the heights between two men, and one of them was flung over, or fell over. It was Captain Dane.

The name startled them all. Mr. Apperly was present still, and he lifted his face of law with a sharp suspicion.

"You say a man was scuffling with Captain Dane, and eventually pitched him over, Mitchel?"

"As it seemed to me, sir. That they were quarrelling and struggling is certain; and Captain Dane would not be likely to fling himself down."

"I fear, then, his assailant was the man Ravensbird," gravely observed Mr. Apperly. "He was heard to utter threats of revenge against his master to-day."

"It was him, sir, safe enough!" cried Mitchel, speaking in accordance with his assumed conviction. "I'd never have thought it of him, though. But what is to be done?" added the man, in a more energetic tone. "The tide is safe to have carried away the body."

"Are you *sure* he was dead, Mitchel?" asked the surgeon.

"Stone dead, sir. It was nothing but that which frightened me so."

What was to be done, indeed! They might well ask it. Without more delay, they all, with the exception of Mitchel, and a man who stayed behind to take care of him, started off to the

spot by way of the land: the beach, they knew, was then impassable, for the tide was up.

Gaining the heights by the chapel, they looked down. The tide was nearly at its full height, and the beach covered with it. Not a trace, above or below, could be seen of the calamity, as described by Mitchel: and there remained little chance but that the body had been carried out to sea. Satisfying their curiosity to the full, by gazing down at the water so bright in the moon's rays, they took counsel as to what should be the next step. Somebody must break the news to Lord Dane; and the two professional gentlemen, as the most fitting, undertook the task.

"I don't like to do it," abruptly exclaimed the doctor, as they walked across the greensward, the castle and its lights in front of them. "Harry Dane was not the favourite son; but still—a son is a son."

"I'm sure I don't," returned Mr. Apperly. "It strikes me, do you know, that you and I are not the proper people to do this. I think it should fall to Herbert Dane."

Not a more welcome suggestion could he have made. The surgeon gladly caught at it, and they left the castle for the present, and bent their steps to Herbert Dane's residence. The modest household of that gentleman and his sister consisted of but two servants, a maid and a man. The latter came to the door and said his master was at home.

Mr. Herbert Dane was making himself comfortable. He sat on a sofa before the fire, a cigar in his mouth, and some glasses at his elbow. His back was towards them as they went in.

"This is your promised nine o'clock, Harry!" he cried out. "A pretty long while to keep a fellow waiting! I suppose you have been dancing attendance on that yacht."

"Mr. Herbert——"

Herbert Dane turned short round at the surgeon's voice, and rose. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" he said, with a half laugh. "I thought it was Captain Dane: I am expecting him."

They did not take the offered chairs. They waited until the servant had closed the door, and then looked gravely at Herbert, in the vain hope that their countenances might in a degree prepare

him for the news. It was again the surgeon who spoke.


"Mr. Herbert, we have a most unpleasant task to perform, and we have come to you to help us out with it. We were on our way to the castle, bearing evil tidings to Lord Dane. An accident has happened to his son."

But Herbert Dane was more intent on hospitality than on taking in the sound of the words, and was bustling about, placing spirits on the table, and ringing the bell for more glasses. Only one gas-burner was alight, and that but dimly, but the fire was blazing cheerily. He pushed aside the sofa and extended his hand to turn the gas on, instead of which he turned it out.

"A plague on my clumsiness! I never do know which way these screws ought to go. Gentlemen——"

"Mr. Herbert, you did not hear me, I think," interposed the surgeon. "Never mind the gas. A dreadful accident has happened to Captain Dane, and we want you to break the tidings to his father."

"To Captain Dane! What is it?"



"He has fallen, or been thrown, over the cliff by the chapel. There's little doubt it has killed him."

Herbert Dane had twisted up some paper, and was putting it between the bars of the grate, intending to relight the gas. He dropped it from his hand, and turned his dismayed face, on which the fire-light played, towards his visitors. They noticed how pale it was becoming.

"Fallen over the cliff?" he uttered. "When? How? How did it happen? I have been expecting him here since nine o'clock."

They told him all they knew, and asked him to be the one to break the news to Lord Dane. Herbert Dane looked blank at the request. He'd go a hundred miles rather than do it, he said, presently. He had not been in favour latterly at the castle, and his uncle might receive it worse from him than from any one. He'd go with them and help, but he'd not be the chief spokesman. It seemed to him a very horrible addition that the body should have been washed away: Harry might not have been dead. "The preventive-man was certainly a fool," he continued with emphasis.

"He ought to have gone up the steps and got assistance at the castle. Which of them was it?"

"Mitchel: I said so," replied Mr. Wild.

"And a thousand pities it should have been Mitchel: any other of the men would not have lost his senses over it. To think he should have fallen into a fit, and been unable to speak until it was too late!" continued the surgeon, resentfully.

Herbert Dane tossed his hair from his brow. He was leaning his forehead on his hand, his elbow on the mantelpiece. "Does Mitchel say that he could not distinguish who the other one was, struggling with Harry—with Captain Dane?" he asked.

"Fast enough," cried out the lawyer, before his friend could speak. "Who should it be but the discharged man, Ravensbird?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Herbert Dane, a glow flashing into his pale countenance. "I told Harry, when I met him this afternoon, he must take care of that man. Not but that my warning was spoken as much in jest as in earnest," he added, in a dreamy tone.

"We are wasting time, Mr. Herbert," said

the surgeon. "Unless we see Lord Dane at once, he may get to hear it in some abrupt manner: and that would not be desirable. Besides, it is already late."

"But won't you take something first?"

They declined; and Herbert Dane followed them from the room, taking his hat from the little hall as he passed through it. The servant was opening the door.

"Am I to ask Captain Dane to wait, sir, when he comes?" inquired the man.

"Captain Dane?" mechanically repeated Herbert, looking at the servant as if half bewildered. "No."

The first person they saw at the castle was Bruff. Lord Dane was in the dining-room: his usual sitting-room at all times of late. Lady Dane was with him. Bruff thought they were expecting Captain Dane home every minute. The gentlemen could go in.

The two went in, ushered through the hall by Bruff. Herbert Dane walked half way across it, and then turned round. When Bruff came back, he found him standing underneath the large gateway.


"I declare I don't like to face them, Bruff," he exclaimed. "The telling of ill news used to make me shiver as a boy. It will be an awful shock, especially for Lady Dane."

"What has happened, Mr. Herbert? They whispered something about the captain as they went in. He was quite well when he went out from dinner."

"I really cannot tell you what has happened; I don't understand it," was the reply of Herbert Dane. "They came to me just now with a tale that he had fallen over the cliff, here, near the ruins, and asked me to come up and help them to break it to Lord Dane. Let us go on the heights, Bruff, and see if we can see anything!"

Bruff got his hat and went after Mr. Herbert, feeling stunned with bewilderment, but incredulous on the whole. Herbert told him what he had heard: and Mr. Bruff audibly wondered whether Mitchel was a "born fool."

Meanwhile, the two gentlemen were imparting the tidings to Lord and Lady Dane. These things are often mercifully softened. It was the case here. Mr. Apperly happened to say that the



supervisor, Cotton, entirely disbelieved the story, judging it to be a chimera of Mitchel's brain, induced by the man's approaching illness : and if Lord and Lady Dane did not entirely rest in this hope, they at least found considerable comfort in it. Mr. Wild allowed that Mitchel's brain, if excited by the account of Captain Dane's quarrel with Ravensbird, might have actually imagined the scene of the scuffle between them on the heights ; and the tale he told be altogether a delusion.

But Lord Dane did not sit still under the hope and do nothing. He had not the use of his legs himself, but he speedily set in motion those who had. Some of the servants were sent flying for the man, Mitchel, some for the police, some across the heights, and some to the bay to see whether the Pearl was gone. Herbert Dane came back with Bruff, and agreed with his uncle that the tale was incredible.

"I have been waiting at home for him all the evening," Herbert said. "I met Harry this afternoon, and he said he'd come in at nine o'clock, after the yacht was off, and smoke a cigar with

me. He had promised to do so last week, and never came."

"It is not *possible* that Ravensbird should dare to attack him as a footpad would!" exclaimed Lord Dane, his haughty face flushing crimson.

"My lord," spoke up Bruff, "a note was left here for the captain about an hour ago. Mills, the sailmaker, brought it up. He has been at work on board the yacht, and he said the American gentleman gave it to him just as they were putting off."

"Then the yacht's gone!" cried Lord Dane. "Bring me that note, Bruff."

Lord Dane opened it at once; he was a man given to act promptly and decisively, and he considered the circumstances justified the measure. The note was addressed to the Honourable William Dane, and contained but a few words:

"On board the Pearl: half-past eight o'clock.

"DEAR WILLIAM,

"What has become of you? I got your message, declining dinner, but have been expecting you since. It is not kind; though I conclude

something has unexpectedly detained you. We are off in five minutes. I shall look for you to the last.

“ Ever yours,

“ C. MONCTON.”

“ Why, when Harry left the dinner-table he said he was going then to the yacht,” cried Lord Dane, giving the note to Mr. Apperly.

“ What time was that, my lord ?”

“ What time was it, Bruff ?”

“ I think it must have been half-past eight, my lord,” replied the butler ; “ or close upon it.”


“ I dare say it was. He lingered on in a brown study at the table, drinking nothing. But he told me he did not think the yacht would go out before nine or half-past.”

The sergeânt of police answered to his summons, and came up to the castle ; but not Mitchel, the preventive-man, he was too ill. Mills, the sailmaker, came, sent for by Lord Dane ; and he proved that Captain Dane did not go down to the yacht. Colonel Moncton, he said, was looking for him to the last moment, but the captain did not come. At the instant of their putting off, the

colonel gave him the note, and asked him to bring it up to the castle.

At length the bustle of inquiry was over and the castle cleared, the police having received Lord Dane's orders to apprehend Ravensbird. The old Lord and Lady Dane sat up the livelong night, losing hope with every passing moment. The tide receded from the strip of beach, leaving nothing on it, leaving no signs that anything, dead or alive, had been there, leaving not even Mitchel's coat. And at length the morning light dawned, and the morning sun shone out to gladden the world, but no trace had been found of Harry Dane.

Just before entering Danesheld, standing in an obscure spot, midway between the first house in the village and the sea, was a small inn, called the Sailors' Rest. It was kept by a man of the name of Hawthorne, who had once been gamekeeper to Lord Dane. A well-conducted inn it was, of rather a better class than a common public-house, affording good bed and board to travellers, and had also its share of bar and parlour custom. The men-servants from the castle were fond of drop-



ping in, to drink their glass of ale with the landlord ; and it was at this house that Ravensbird had taken up his sojourn, when turned out of doors by his master.

On the morning subsequent to the calamity, which was not yet generally known, the landlord was in the bar alone ; or, at any rate, he thought he was alone. He was busy polishing his taps and setting things straight, according to his custom before breakfast, when one of the preventive-men, on his way to the beach, came up the passage and entered.

“ Half a gill of rum, landlord ; the morning air’s chilly, like.”

“ We shall have a fine day again,” observed the landlord, as he handed him what he asked for.

“ It’s to be hoped we shall, for the work that’s got to be done in it,” replied the customer. “ They are going to drag in shore for the body ; and I suppose all Danesheld will turn out to see.”

“ Drag for what body ? Has any one been lost ?”

The man was in the act of putting the glass of

rum to his lips. He drew it back, and gazed at the landlord.

"Do you mean to say that you have not heard of the misfortune that has overtaken the castle? Captain Dane's murdered."

"Captain Dane murdered!" echoed the landlord, doubting whether his ears played him false.

"He was assaulted on the heights last night, just opposite the castle, and flung over the cliff," explained the man. "Mitchel was on his beat underneath and saw it all. When he came to examine the fallen man, he found it to be Captain Dane; and he was stone dead."

Mr. Hawthorne fell back amidst his taps, feeling not far off "stone dead" himself.

"And Mitchel, he comes running up to the guardhouse at the pace of a steam-engine, which upset his heart, or some vital part in him, and must needs fall right into a fit, and never spoke for an hour or more. The consequence was, not a soul knew of it in time, and the tide came up and washed the body away. Sickly fellows like Mitchel are never good for much."

"And who was it attacked him?—who threw

him over?" asked the landlord, when he could find his tongue.

"Nobody need ask that twice. It was the servant, Ravensbird."

Once more the landlord backed against the taps, and a brass ladle, which he happened to have in his hand, fell to the ground with a clatter.

"Ravensbird!—*Ravensbird*, do you say? Why he has been staying here since yesterday! I couldn't have slept in the house with him last night if I had known this."

"'Twas Ravensbird done it, and nobody else. He wasn't long carrying out his threats of revenge. The curiourest part is, how he managed to entrap Captain Dane on to the heights; to their very edge. Some say—"

At this moment an interruption occurred which nearly made the speaker (as he phrased it afterwards) start out of his skin. Over the high wooden screen which ran partially across the bar, its seat facing the fireplace, appeared the head of Mr. Ravensbird, who had been quietly seated there all the time.

"Your name's Dubber, I believe," he said, glaring indignation at the preventive-man.

Dubber was, as the saying runs, taken to. He stood in silence, too much confused to make any reply.

"How dare you stand there and traduce me?" demanded Ravensbird. "By what authority do you accuse me of the crime of murder?"

"Well now, Mr. Ravensbird, if it is not true, and you are innocent, I'm sure I beg your pardon," spoke the man, gathering his wits and making the best of the situation. "As to my telling Hawthorne—if I had not told him, the next comer-in would: the wonder is, he didn't hear it last night. If you were not a party concerned, you'd be the first yourself to talk of it. I didn't speak in ill-nature."

"Did I understand you to say that Mitchel affirms I pitched Captain Dane over the cliff—that he saw me do it?"

"It's what Mitchel says."

"Did he say so to you?"

"Not to me; I haven't seen him since. Sims

told me about it, and he was in the guardhouse when Mitchel got in."

"Is it true that Captain Dane is dead?" continued Ravensbird, after a pause.

"*That's* true enough; and the tide carried his body away. They are getting ready the drags now. Lord Dane has had the police up at the castle half the night, they say. But I must be off, unless I'd like to get reported; my time's up."

He turned short round with the last sentence and went out hastily, glad to be away from the sallow face, the stern eye of Ravensbird. Mr. Ravensbird descended from the seat of the screen, on which he had been standing, and came round to the landlord.

"What do you know of this business, Hawthorne?"

"If you were sitting inside the screen, Mr. Ravensbird, you must know as much as I do," answered the man, feeling by no means secure that Ravensbird was not going to attack himself. "I never heard a word of it till Dubber came in. You did startle me, putting your head up like that! I thought you were in bed."

"I have been down this half hour. What do you think of this tale?"


"I don't know what to think of it. Who would do harm to Captain Dane? He had no enemies, and was a friend to us all. I'm sure the quarrel with you was quite unlike him."

"Unlike his general nature. He was put up—and so was I. Where's my hat? Upstairs, I think. I shall go out and ascertain the truth of this business."

He quitted the bar to go to his chamber, and almost at the same moment the sergeant of police entered. He gave a quiet glance round, and then nodded to the landlord.

"Good morning, Hawthorne. You have got Master Ravensbird lodging here, I believe. Is he up yet?"

"He was here in the bar not an instant ago, Mr. Bent. He's gone to his room now to get his hat. He wants to go out and learn the particulars of this sad affair about Captain Dane. Dubber has been in, telling of it. I'm sure you might have knocked me down with the click of an empty gun."



The sergeant withdrew to the passage, and there he propped himself against the wall. The position commanded a view of the back door of the house as well as the front.

"A fine morning, Mr. Ravensbird," cried he, as the latter appeared.

"Very. I am going out to enjoy it."

"An instant first. I want to say a few words to you."

"Not now," returned Ravensbird, impatience in his tone.

"No time like the present," was the reply of the sergeant, as he laid his hand on the man's shoulder. "Don't be restive. I *must* detain you."

Ravensbird turned his sallow face on the officer, his eyes flashing with anger. "By what right? What do you mean?"

"Now, Ravensbird, don't be unreasonable. Take things quietly. You are my prisoner, and all the resistance you can make will not avail you."

Ravensbird's answer to this *was* resistance. A slight scuffle, and he suddenly found a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"The most senseless thing a man can do is to attempt to resist an officer in the execution of his duty," observed the police-sergeant in a tone of pleasant argument, as though he were discussing the point with a knot of friends. "Lord Dane gave me orders last night to arrest you: I might have knocked the house up and took you then; but I thought I'd do the thing politely and wait till morning. I put a man or two on outside, back and front, to make sure."

"How dare Lord Dane order me into custody? He has not the right to do it. He is not a magistrate."

The sergeant broke into a little amused laugh. "A stipendiary magistrate, no; but he is the lord-lieutenant of the county. Don't you question Lord Dane's *rights*, my good man."

Ravensbird was cooling down. "Understand me," he began;—"your name's Bent, I think?" he broke off to say.

"Bent, it is."

"Understand me, Mr. Bent: I do not wish to resist any lawful authority, and if I were free as air this moment, I should stay and face the

charge out. What I am annoyed at is this: I was on the point of going abroad to inquire into the attack on Captain Dane, to pick up what I could; for, by fair means or by unfair, I intend to sift it out. I have a motive for so doing that you know nothing of; and I'd rather have given a ten-pound note from my pocket than been stopped at it."

The sergeant coughed; as incredulous a cough as ever fell on the ear of captured man. There was not a shadow of doubt in his opinion, and he did not suppose there could be in anybody else's, that the true attacker of Captain Dane was before him.

"I'm sorry I can't spare you. It's all very plausible, Ravensbird, this show of wanting to learn particulars, but you have got an old card to deal with."

Ravensbird looked steadily at the sergeant, never quailing. "You may be an old card; experience has made you one; but you have taken the wrong man in taking me. I did not know that any accident, any ill, had happened to Captain Dane, until Dubber just now told it; I did not

know but he was alive and well. And that I swear."

"Now don't you take and swear to any nonsense, or it may be used against you," was the sharp retort. "It's not my way to make bad worse for those who come into my custody; but when they will get slipping out all sorts of admissions in their folly, why I'm obliged to take note of it. The best thing you can do is to sew your mouth up until you are before my Lord Dane. And that's friendly advice, mind."

Possibly Ravensbird felt it to be so. And if he did not literally sew his mouth up with thread, he at least relapsed into silence.

CHAPTER V.

PUTTING HER TO THE OATH.

AMIDST the surmises, the doubts, the suspicions, that were shaking the breast of my Lord Dane, equally with that of every inmate of the castle, two convictions gradually cleared themselves from the general mist, and stood out prominently: the one was, of the certain guilt of Richard Ravensbird; the other, that the extraordinary behaviour of Lady Adelaide Errol on the previous night must have had reference to the calamity.

Lady Adelaide denied it. Lord Dane called for her the first thing in the morning, and put the question to her in his straightforward manner: "Did she witness anything of the struggle, and was it that which had terrified her?" With many tears and protestations, and apparently in much terror still, for her frame shook and her face was white, she totally denied it. But it must

be confessed that Lord Dane retained his suspicions.

About ten o'clock, Ravensbird was marshalled to the castle. Lord Dane sat in his chair of state in the great hall. Mr. Apperly was with him; and the lawyer—though not there professionally, for this was no official investigation, simply what Lord Dane called a private inquiry—had a pen and ink before him, intending to take down, for his own satisfaction, any point that struck him. Vigorous in mind, if incapable in body, was Lord Dane. He had not yet seen Mitchel, but the man was expected up. Squire Lester was near Lord Dane, not in his magisterial capacity, but as a friend. Supervisor Cotton was also there. All doubt as to the fate of Captain Dane was over; the morning tide had washed his hat ashore, and a fishing boat picked up Mitchel's coat at sea. A feeling was gaining ground that the fall was not the result of accident, or of a blow given in the heat of dispute, but was deliberate murder. Never was the guilt of a prisoner more positively assumed than that of Ravensbird, not only by Lord Dane and his family, but by the police.

The sergeant had made his own inquiries amidst the household, and his opinion was conclusive. No little sensation was created when Ravensbird appeared, not in handcuffs—those had been removed—but guarded by the sergeant officially.

“You bad, wicked man!” burst out Lord Dane, in anguish, forgetting the dignity of his position in the feelings of a father; “could nothing serve your turn but you must murder my poor son?”

“I did not murder him, my lord,” respectfully answered Ravensbird.

“We don’t want useless quibbling here,” interrupted Lawyer Apperly, before Lord Dane could speak. “If you did not deliberately kill him with a knife, or a club, or a pistol, or any weapon of that sort, you attacked him and threw him over the cliff. I don’t know what else you can call it but murder.”

“I never was on the heights at all last night. I never saw Captain Dane after he turned me out of doors in the morning,” quietly responded Ravensbird. “Who is it that accuses me?”

“Now, my good man, this absurd equivoca-

tion will not avail you, and you only waste breath and my lord's time in using it," impetuously cried Mr. Apperly, who was of an excitable temperament, and apt to put himself into a heat. "You have brought enough sorrow upon his lordship, without seeking to prolong this trying scene."

"I asked you, Mr. Apperly, who was my accuser, and I have a right to be answered," said the prisoner in rather a dogged tone, for he saw that his guilt was taken for granted by all present.

"Circumstances and your own actions are your accusers, and Mitchel the coastguardsman is evidence," explained Mr. Apperly.

"Where is Mitchel?" feverishly interrupted Lord Dane. "Could he not have been here before this?"

Inspector Cotton had thought he would have been: he went out of the hall to see if there were any signs of his coming.

"Does Mitchel say that it was I, my lord, who had the struggle with Captain Dane—that he saw me?" questioned Ravensbird.

"Of course he says it," interrupted the lawyer

before Lord Dane could answer. "Do you hope he would conceal it, prisoner?"

"Then he tells a malicious, gratuitous lie, Mr. Apperly," was the prisoner's rejoinder, as he turned and faced the lawyer. "And he must do it to screen the real offender."

Lord Dane inclined his head forward and spoke.

"Ravensbird, as Mr. Apperly says, this line of conduct will only tell against you. Had no person whatever witnessed the act, there could have been no reasonable doubt in regard to it; for who else, but you, was at variance with my son? Of the nature of the quarrel between you and him yesterday morning I am ignorant, but it is certain you must have provoked him grievously; and you quitted the castle uttering threats against him."

"My lord, so far that is true," replied Ravensbird, calmly and respectfully; "I gave Captain Dane certain information, by which I thought to do him a service, but he received it in quite a contrary spirit. It was connected with his own affairs; was not pleasant information; and it aroused his anger towards me. Smarting under

the unmerited treatment—for it was unmerited—I grew angry in my turn, and I confess that I answered my master as I ought not to have answered him. This vexed him further, and he said some harsh and bitter things. We were both in a passion; both excited; he beyond control; and he ordered me out of the house on the instant, and kicked me down stairs. I ask you, my lord, whether it was likely I could take it calmly, without a retort? I had been a good servant to my master; had served him faithfully for years; he had reposed confidence in me; had grown to treat me almost as a friend; and that made me feel the insult all the more keenly. I left the castle overflowing with wrath, and for the next two hours all I did was to give vent to it in harsh words—”

“You were heard to say you would be revenged,” interrupted Lord Dane.

“Ten times, at least, I said it, my lord, and many heard me; but by the end of the two hours my anger was spent. Threatening words they had been, but idle as the wind. I never seriously entertained the thought of taking vengeance on my master. I liked him too well. I had but spoken

in the heat of passion; and before the day was over I actually began in my own mind to find excuses for him."

"You forget that your struggle with him was witnessed by the preventive-man," spoke Lord Dane, who had listened impassively.

"It never was, my lord, for no struggle with me took place. What Mitchel's motive for accusing me can be, I cannot tell: either his eyesight must have deceived him, or he is screening the real offender at my cost. But I don't fear: the truth is sure to come to light."

"The truth is to light already," sarcastically interrupted Mr. Apperly. "But all this is waste of time. My lord, can we ask no questions of anybody else while we are waiting for Mitchel? Sergeant Bent here craves permission to make some inquiry of Lady Adelaide Errol. He has heard she was a witness of the scuffle."

"She says she was not," replied Lord Dane, while Mr. Lester lifted his head in surprise.

"How was it possible that Lady Adelaide could have witnessed it?" asked Mr. Lester.

Lord Dane explained. Tempted by the beauty

of the night, Lady Adelaide had foolishly run out across the heights. She came back at once, crying out, evidently frightened. He himself thought she must have witnessed something of it, but she denied it.

"Pardon me, my lord, if I put in my opinion," said the police-sergeant: "her ladyship is but a young and timid girl, and would doubtless shrink from acknowledging she had been a witness to anything so dreadful. From what I have heard your servants say, the French maid especially, I feel sure she did see something of it. If you will allow her to come in, I'll put a question or two to her."

"Have her in if you like," said Lord Dane, adopting the view taken by the officer, and thinking that if she did know anything she should be made to speak.

It was Mr. Lester who went for her. And it is probable that Lady Adelaide did not dare to disobey the summons, for she came in leaning on his arm. As she stood near Lord Dane, in her white morning dress with its blue ribbons, she seemed a very vision of loveliness. The sunlight played on

her flaxen hair, and her colour went and came fitfully. Mr. Lester had placed a chair, but she did not accept it; she seemed only eager to get away again, and stood before the table, both her hands resting on it.

“Your ladyship witnessed the struggle last night on the heights,” began the sharp police-sergeant, speaking very blandly, but in a perfectly assured tone; “will you kindly tell me how much of it you saw?”

The confident tone deceived her. She assumed something or other had come out to betray her, and that further denial would be useless. Glancing round the room in a terror not to be mistaken, the expression of her eyes not unlike that of a stag at bay, she caught the penetrating gaze of Sophie Deffloe. Why had *she* come in? A faint cry escaped Lady Adelaide’s lips.

“Had your ladyship any motive in running out on the heights last night?” proceeded the officer, who had no suspicion but that it was quite an exceptional occurrence. “You could not, I presume, have known that any quarrel was about to take place there?”

"Oh no, no," she vehemently answered, bursting into tears.

"The affray took you by surprise, then? as we have been assuming. Will your ladyship relate what you saw?"

Her ladyship glanced round the room, the expression of her face unmistakable. She sought for compassion, and she sought for escape: she gazed pitifully up to Lord Dane's eyes, into Mr. Lester's, and then she turned and caught the stern ones of her maid.

"Why does Sophie stand there?"

The appeal was made to Lord Dane. He had seen the girl, and supposed she was there in attendance on her mistress. The police-officer thought Lady Adelaide was trifling with him.

"It may be better that your ladyship should declare now what you saw and know, or you may be called upon to do it more publicly."

"Speak out, Adelaide," said Lord Dane, sternly, feeling there was more behind than she had confessed to, and angry at her previous denial. "If you don't, I'll have you examined on your oath. You told me you ran inside the ruins and began

thinking of ghosts, and that the thought frightened you."

"Oh no, no, uncle, not the oath!" she burst forth, the one word seeming to have drowned all others. "I'll tell you the whole truth at once, I will, indeed," she added, turning from the keen gaze of the sergeant. "It's true I did begin to think of ghosts as I ran through the ruins, and I was turning back in my fright, when I heard some voices outside, near the edge of the cliff. I felt glad of it, because it took off my loneliness, and I went cautiously to the outer opening and peeped out. Two men were on the very edge of the cliff—struggling, fighting; and in another moment one of them disappeared—he had fallen over. It nearly frightened me to death. I flew back through the ruins, across the grass to the castle; and I believe I screamed, though I don't think I was conscious of it at the time. Bruff came out and met me; and that's all I know."

"Why did you not state this at the time?" cried Lord Dane, his brow darkening.

"I was too frightened," she sobbed; "I was

sick with fear. Besides, I thought my aunt would be angry enough with me for having run out, without confessing to what I had seen."

"Had you spoken then it might have saved Harry's life," said Lord Dane, in a low tone. "Did you recognise him?"

"Oh no, uncle," she said with a wail. "How can you ask it?"

"Did you recognise the other one?" asked the officer.


"I did not recognise either."

"Not at all? Not in the least—in any sign? Surely your ladyship could see whether he was a tall man or a short one?"

Never had Lady Adelaide betrayed greater terror than she was betraying now. Her lips were white, her hands trembled. Twice she essayed to speak before words came.

"I don't know what either looked like; I don't know whether they were tall or short. It all passed in a moment."

"Did no idea, ever so faint, convey to your ladyship's mind a notion of who either of them might be?" came the persistent question.



"No; unless I thought that they were robbers attacking one another."

"Nor the voices either, my lady? Did you not recognise them?"

"I did not hear the voices, except that first moment when I was inside the ruins," she answered shivering. "They were not speaking at the last, in the struggle; or, if they were, I did not hear them."

"Then you positively recognised neither Captain Dane nor his assailant?"

"Why can't you believe me?" she retorted, in a tone of angry complaint, of wild pain. "Was not Captain Dane my cousin? Had I recognised either him or the other, should I not be ready to avow it? Let me go back," she added imploringly to Lord Dane. "If I stop here for ever I cannot tell you more."

"An instant yet, my lady," persisted the sergeant. "Did the other—the one who did not go over the cliff—attempt to follow you when you ran away?"

"Not that I know of. I did not look round to see."

"I do hope and trust your ladyship has told all," was the comment of the police-sergeant, as she moved away to the door, waiting for no further permission.

Mr. Lester advanced and led her from the hall, Sophie Deffloe slowly following. "How *cruel* they are!" she said, the tears running down her cheeks. "As if I should not be too glad to tell anything that I knew. I wonder you allowed that man to pursue me with his questions!"

"In the presence of Lord Dane, on an occasion such as this, I am nobody," whispered Mr. Lester, his tone one of the warmest, tenderest sympathy. "I felt for you more than I can express. But, Adelaide, don't run out at night alone again."

"Never, never!" was her vehement answer. "This has been a life's lesson to me. But I thought no harm."

"Harm!—no," murmured Mr. Lester, as he bowed over her hand at the drawing-room door and resigned her, Sophie Deffloe having halted at a distance to watch her in.

"What are you staring at, Sophie?" in-

quired Mr. Lester, as he passed the girl to return to the hall.

"That regards me," she replied, translating her thoughts more literally than she generally did.

Lord Dane grew impatient in his chair of state, waiting for the appearance of the preventive-man. There seemed to be some great delay. The most unconcerned individual present appeared to be Richard Ravensbird, and his cool, independent bearing rather irritated Lord Dane. That there was not a loophole of possibility of his innocence, all Danesheld would have testified to.

A murmur, and Mitchel came in at last, under the wing of Mr. Cotton. The man looked pale and ill, and Lord Dane ordered him a chair while he spoke to what he had seen and heard. He described the hearing of the voices in dispute, the seeing the struggle on the edge of the heights, and the fall of one of them, whom he found to be Captain Dane.

"Thrown over by Ravensbird," cried hot-tongued Lawyer Apperly.

"Yes," assented Mitchel.

"Were there no signs of life whatever in my

son?" inquired Lord Dane, suppressing, as he best could, all signs of feeling.

"None, my lord : he was dead beyond mistake. I wish I could have carried him away in my arms, my lord, instead of leaving him there to be washed away by the tide!" fervently added the man, in an accession of regret and remorse. "But it was beyond my strength. If I had not fell into that fit, there'd have been time to get to him."

"You could not help it, Mitchel," replied Lord Dane, in a sad, kind tone. "Did you recognise it to be my son on the heights, before he fell?"

"No, my lord," replied Mitchel, shaking his head. "The moon was bright, but moonlight isn't daylight, and I couldn't get an over clear view above, from the place where I stood. The scuffle did not seem to last a moment, either, before he was over. It was only when I got to him, trying to lift him up, that I saw it was Captain Dane."

An interruption came from Ravensbird. He had stood with his stern black eyes fixed on Mitchel ever since the man's entrance; they

seemed to devour every turn of his countenance, every word that fell from his lips.

"My lord," said he, turning to Lord Dane, "if I were before a regular court, undergoing a formal examination, I should be allowed an advocate; the worst criminal is not denied so much as that; but here I have none to help me; I stand alone. I should like to ask this man a question, my lord."

"Ask it," said Lord Dane.

Ravensbird turned and faced Mitchel. "You have just said you could not recognise Captain Dane on the heights, not getting a clear view. If you could not recognise him, how could you recognise me?"

"I did not recognise you," replied Mitchel.

A pause. Richard Ravensbird spoke out eagerly—passionately:

"Then why did you say you did?"

"I didn't say it."

"You did. As I am told."

"No, I did not say it. My eyesight did not carry me so far. It—"

The words were interrupted by the police-

sergeant. "Do you mean to deny, Mitchel, now that you are before my lord, that it was Ravensbird who flung over Captain Dane?"

"I couldn't say that it was, sir, or that it was not. It might have been him, or it might have been anybody else, for all I saw."

The sergeant looked at Lord Dane. "I understood your lordship, last night, that Mitchel had recognised Ravensbird as the offender."

"I understood he had," replied Lord Dane. "You told me so, Apperly; as did Mr. Wild."

Mr. Apperly brought his spectacles and his red face down upon Mitchel, and spoke in a sharp, quick tone:

"What do you mean by this denial, Mitchel? You know you said last evening it was Ravensbird; said it in the guardhouse."

"I said it was sure to have been Ravensbird on account of the quarrel he had with his master in the morning," answered Mitchel. "Everybody else said so too. But I never said it from my own knowledge; from my own eyesight."

"Then, are we to understand, Mitchel, that you do not know positively who it was that was

engaged in the conflict with my son?—that you did not recognise the person?” asked Lord Dane.

“I did not, my lord. I surmised it to be Mr. Ravensbird, of course, because of the quarrel we had heard of; but I could not see the people who were struggling on the heights; that is, not to recognise them. I should not have known the one to be Captain Dane but for his falling down to the beach where I was.”

The whole room felt nonplussed. Everybody in it, including the usually keen and correct police-officer, had understood that Mitchel was ready to swear, by the evidence of his own eyesight, to Richard Ravensbird.

“It does not make a shade of difference,” cried Mr. Apperly, over-zealous in the Dane interest and his own conviction. “Richard Ravensbird was heard to utter threats against his master—”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Apperly, it makes every difference,” sharply interrupted Ravensbird. “For a credible witness to say he saw me commit the murder, is one thing; but when he says he did *not* see me, it’s another.”

"Perhaps you can account for your time yesterday, Ravensbird, hour by hour, until ten o'clock at night?" cried the lawyer.

"Perhaps I can, if it's necessary I should," retorted Ravensbird. "After I was turned from these gates, I went straight to the Sailors' Rest, and the landlord can tell you so."

"But you may not have stopped at the Sailors' Rest?"

"I did stop at it: and twenty people going in and out saw me there. I did not stir out all day; I dined and had tea with Hawthorne and his wife."

"What did you do after tea?"

"After tea I sat with them for some time, and then I went out for a walk."

"I thought so!" cried impetuous Mr. Apperly. "Where did you walk to? Which road?"

Ravensbird paused in hesitation, and the fact could but tell against him.

"I don't know that it matters to anybody which road I went," came the tardy answer.

"It matters to everybody. Perhaps you took this road? Why, bless me!" added the lawyer,

jumping up with the suddenness of the recollection, "I met you myself, Ravensbird! I was on my way home from a client's, and I met you coming in this direction; towards the castle. It was about seven o'clock."

"I did not see you," said Ravensbird.

"Perhaps not. I saw you, and that's more to the purpose. Where were you going?"

"That's my business," answered the man.

"I was going about no harm, and I did none. I was not out long; I was soon back at the Sailors Rest."

"What time did you get back?" quickly asked the lawyer.

"Mitchel," as quickly rejoined Ravensbird, "what time was it when you saw the scuffle and the fall."

"It was between half-past eight and a quarter to nine," replied Mitchel. "Hard upon the three-quarters, I should say."

Ravensbird drew back with the air of a man who has vanquished his adversaries and done with contention. "That settles the question, so far as I am concerned, my lord. I was back in the

private parlour at the Sailors' Rest by twenty minutes past eight. I remember hearing it strike a quarter past by the church-clock just before I got in, and I took out my watch to see whether it was right. I did not stir out again all the evening."

Lord Dane felt amazed at the man's confident manner; he did not believe a word.

"Mitchel," he said, "are you sure as to the time yourself?"

But even as Lord Dane spoke, he remembered that his son was indoors with him, sitting at the dining-table, until half-past eight, or close upon it.

"I am quite sure, my lord," was Mitchel's answer. "It's not often we preventive-men are mistaken as to the time; we've nothing to do, marching about there, but listen to the quarters and the hours as the church-clock gives them out. Besides, there's the tide to guide us; it's quite an amusement to note the tide and the time keeping pace together. I should think the real time that Captain Dane fell was about twenty-two minutes to nine. It went the three-quarters

soon after I left him, when I was running along the beach."

"I suppose you could swear to this, Mitchel, if required?" cried keen Lawyer Apperly.

"Yes, I could, sir; it's the truth."

The answer went for little. Mr. Apperly felt quite certain that there was a mistake somewhere.

"Perhaps, Ravensbird," he suggested, "you will inform Lord Dane what you were doing with yourself during that interval of absence from the Sailors' Rest, and where you passed it. According to your own account you must have been away pretty nearly an hour and a half."

"I respectfully submit to my lord that where I was does not matter to this inquiry," was the reply of Ravensbird. "Mitchel declares the murder must have been committed—"

"Stop a minute. This is the second time you have called it 'murder.'"

"Well?" cried Ravensbird: "it is what other people are calling it."

"Not in the confident tone you use. Go on."

"Mitchel says it took place at about twenty-two minutes to nine. I was back at the Sailors'

Rest before twenty minutes past eight. Even had I gone direct from the heights to the inn (which I did not, I was not on the heights at all last night), I must have left them at eight o'clock, or thereabouts, to get down at the time I speak of. I was in by twenty minutes past eight, and I did not go out again. If this is proved—and you can get a dozen testifying witnesses to its truth, by sending to the Sailors' Rest—then I submit, Mr. Apperly, that you have no right to inquire into my actions. Once establish that I was not, that I could not have been, the assaulter of Captain Dane, and I am as free and independent as you are. Why, I was playing at dominoes with one of the customers at half-past eight, and I played with him till ten."

The most obvious course at this stage was to send to the Sailors' Rest, that the prisoner's words might be confirmed or refuted. The sergeant himself went down, and Lord Dane waited with ill-concealed impatience. As before, the only man in the room perfectly at his ease, to all appearance, was Ravensbird.

Mr. Bent came back. He came with a crest-

fallen expression of countenance, and acknowledged himself "floored." "Floored for the present." Hawthorne and his wife, with two or three other credible witnesses, declared that Ravensbird was back at the Sailors' Rest by twenty minutes past eight. They were enabled to fix the time from the fact that Ravensbird had called their attention to the clock in the private parlour, he saying it was "just right" with the church. And it was certainly true that he did not leave the house again, and that he was playing at dominoes until near bed-time.

In the teeth of this evidence there could be no pretext for retaining Ravensbird in custody, and Lord Dane unwillingly ordered him out of it. Unwillingly, because from the depth of his heart he still deemed the man to be guilty.

"You are at liberty to go, Richard Ravensbird."

"My lord," said the ex-prisoner, walking forward from the corner where he had chiefly stood, to confront Lord Dane, "I think even yet, in spite of testimony, you believe me to have been the assailant of my master. Once more let

me assert the truth : I never saw him after I left this castle in the morning."

"I do believe it to have been you ; you, and no other," replied Lord Dane, bending forward his severe face. "You have triumphed for the moment ; but I would have you remember, Richard Ravensbird, that crimes such as this are sure to come to light sooner or later."

Ravensbird's only answer was a bow, respectful enough. His manner to Lord Dane throughout had been characterised by marked respect. Indeed, it could not be said that he had been disrespectful to anyone, only fearlessly independent. He passed out of the hall without another word. Bruff was standing in the gateway, but Ravensbird brushed past him, never speaking, and turned towards Danesheld. Following him came Mr. Cotton and Mitchel ; they were not so unsociable, and the butler invited them to drink a glass of ale. Very acceptable was it to poor weak Mitchel.

There remained in the hall Lord Dane, Squire Lester, Mr. Apperly, and the police-sergeant. The two former were talking together. Mr.

Apperly was in a reverie, and the officer was pencilling down some memoranda in an old notebook he had taken from his pocket, his countenance a very thoughtful one.

"You look puzzled, Bent," observed the lawyer, rousing himself.

"It's what I am then, Mr. Apperly. Out and out."

"You still think he's guilty?"

"I'm sure he's guilty," was the emphatic answer.

"Well," said Mr. Apperly, whose opinion had somewhat veered round, after the decisive alibi established, "I don't feel sure of it now. One can't shut one's eyes to facts. If the man was really back at the Sailors' Rest by the time he mentions—"

"I tell you he was not back," interrupted the sergeant; "or else Mitchel is mistaken as to the time. There's not an earthly thing you can be so deceived in, as in evidence given to establish some fact that rests upon time. Look here: you noticed, didn't you, what I stated: that Mr. Hawthorne said he had called their attention, when he

got in, to the fact of its being twenty minutes past eight? That very circumstance was enough, in any experienced mind, to prove his guilt. He did it with a motive, rely upon it. Some craft had been at work: probably he had contrived to put the clock back. It's not *that* that's puzzling me. Ravensbird's neither more nor less clever than others of his stamp, and we shall catch him yet. As to an alibi, I've known the hardest counter-swearing as to time; and both sides honest in what they swore to, only they were mistaken. Their clocks and watches were wrong; or the sun was too fast; or the coaches, that never were out by so much as a minute before, were out then. Pish! *I* know what alibis are worth."

"What is it, then, that's puzzling you?" asked Mr. Apperly, referring to the one sentence.

Their tones had been low; but the sergeant dropped his voice almost to a whisper now, as he answered curtly:

"The young lady. She puzzles me altogether. That she knows more than she has told, I'm sure: that's nothing; folks often give us only half evi-

dence, and the short-coming lies light enough upon their conscience."

"Don't you believe her?"

"I don't say that I entirely disbelieve her. But look here," added the sergeant, using again his favourite phrase, as he was apt to do when very much in earnest, "I can understand her having been frightened at the time: any young girl would be, witnessing a scene such as that: *but what is it that's frightening her now?*"

Mr. Apperly seemed struck with the question. "She did seem to be in fear as she stood here, there's no denying it," he remarked.

"Ay; mark me, sir; if there's anybody, besides himself, that could establish the guilt of Ravensbird, it's the Lady Adelaide. She—"

The sergeant stopped, arrested by a look of Mr. Apperly's. Turning round, he saw the fine old face of Lord Dane extended forwards in rapt attention. He had spoken louder than he thought.

"What is that you are saying, Bent?"

The sergeant explained. He had really no particular wish to keep his suspicion from Lord Dane, and he avowed a belief that the Lady Ade-

laide could, if she chose, speak to the guilt of Ravensbird.

"And her motive for not doing it? her motive?" questioned Lord Dane, hotly.

"Ah, my lord, I can't fathom it; that's where I'm puzzled. That favourite French maid of hers is Ravensbird's sweetheart; perhaps for her sake she is screening him. She looked afraid of the Frenchwoman as she stood here."

Of all the various incidents, aspects, and doubts by which the affair had been surrounded since its occurrence, this new one was about the most objectionable to Lord Dane. He was very much given to jump to conclusions upon impulse, and he did so now. From the first he had felt a latent conviction that Adelaide Errol had not told the truth; he had felt it that morning in the hall as she stood under the informal examination. This suggestion offered a solution of the mystery, and he adopted it with almost measureless anger, and with deep, deep pain. *She* to screen the destroyer of his poor son, of her betrothed husband!

"Thank you for speaking of this, Bent," he

said, his lips trembling, his tone one of concentrated passion. "No doubt you are right: as you were before to-day; when you expressed an opinion that she must have seen something, which she had persistently denied to me. I remember the mention of the oath startled her in a strange degree: we will see what she says to it now."

A peremptory message brought the Lady Adelaide again into the hall: Lord Dane's mandates in his own home might not be disobeyed. She appeared to have called up a dash of bravery to come in with; but it was a poor shallow pretence, and her very lips turned white, and her hands surreptitiously trembled, as she walked up to Lord Dane. Mr. Lester rose to assist her as before, but Lord Dane checked him.

"I will deal with Lady Adelaide this time, Mr. Lester."

She stole a glance at the different expressions on the faces of those present; at the curiosity of Mr. Apperly's, the impassiveness of the police-sergeant's, the compassion of Squire Lester's; but as she met the severity of Lord Dane's, a faint cry

escaped her. He laid his hand upon her wrist, and spoke slowly.

"We have reason to think that your recent denial was false, Adelaide Errol: we believe that you did recognise the assailant of my son. Who was it?"

"I don't know," she answered, an ashy hue overspreading her face.

"You *do* know: as we believe."

"I have said I don't. It was too dark to recognise him," she added, scarcely able, as they all saw, to get the words out from her dry and bloodless lips.

Lord Dane would not put to her the direct leading question — Was it Ravensbird? He waited, never taking his stern gaze from her face. It was a marvel to look at, for whiteness.

"Once more: who was it that had the struggle with my son?"

"I do not know. Indeed, I do not know."

"Then, if that be in truth the case, you will have no objection to testify to it on your oath. Mr. Lester, will you officiate?"

Her face changed to a burning scarlet; and a startled glance of terror—a silent appeal for mercy, rather—went up from it to those merciless ones around. The magistrate took a Book from its place: he would have refused to act, could it have brought any good, but he knew it could not; Lord Dane was resolute. And Mr. Lester thought little of the ceremony: he, at least, ever believed her to be true.

“It is a mere form,” he gently whispered. “Nay, do not tremble so.”

She turned and looked behind her, as if wondering whether there might not be some escape yet. Surely none. And there, at the back, stood Sophie Deffloe. If ever despair shone out of hollow eyes, it shone then from Lady Adelaide’s. Escape! escape!

Escape?—not from this. With hands that shook as they were raised, with words that trembled and faltered on her tongue, with cheeks that were fading again to the hue of the dead, she, Adelaide Errol, spoke the solemn oath before Heaven—that she had recognised neither Captain Dane nor his adversary.

And Lord Dane's suspicions of her truth, and everybody else's suspicions, had any entertained them, were set at rest. Except those of one individual: Police-sergeant Bent.

CHAPTER VI

ANOTHER PHASE IN THE NIGHT'S STORY.

RICHARD RAVENSBIRD, meanwhile, in returning to Danesheld, had encountered Herbert Dane. The gentleman was at his favourite spot, the gate ; where you have already seen him more than once. Not perched upon it whistling, as was his wont in gayer times, but leaning against it in melancholy sadness. No fishing-rod to be spliced was in his hand to-day, no light silver-mounted whip switched its time to his opera tunes. That the untimely fate of his cousin was giving him true and lively concern, there could be no manner of doubt. Exceedingly surprised he looked to see Ravensbird approach at liberty, unaccompanied by those attentive guardians of the law.

“What ! have they let you off, Ravensbird ?”

“Could they do otherwise, Mr. Herbert ?”
was the response of Ravensbird, stopping in face

of his questioner, as though he disdained to shun inquiry.

"Do otherwise!" echoed Herbert Dane.
"Well, I don't know, Ravensbird. If Mitchel saw you pitch my poor cousin over—"

"But Mitchel did not," interrupted Ravensbird, his piercing black eyes fixed full on the face of Herbert Dane.

"I heard that he said so last night; said it in the hearing of several people. Has he eaten his words?"

"No, sir, he has not. Mitchel never spoke the words; it was a misconception altogether. I also heard that he had said so; and I thought he was trying to screen the real offender. He has just now testified to my lord that he could not distinguish who the strugglers were. He would not have known Captain Dane but for his falling at his feet."

"How came the other report to get about, then—that he recognised you?"

"Chiefly, I expect, through Mr. Apperly. He was more set against me than any one."

"And so, on the strength of the non-recogni-

tion, they have given you your liberty? My lord's grief must have made him lenient. I suppose you will hasten now to put the sea or some other formidable barrier between yourself and Danesheld?"

"Why should I do that, sir? An innocent man does not fly like a craven."

"Innocent!" repeated Herbert, in a tone of ridicule, if not of scorn.

"Yes, sir; innocent."

"Ravensbird," said Herbert Dane, quietly, "it is of no use for you to keep on the exalted ropes before me. The words you spoke on this very spot yesterday morning, threatening vengeance on your master, would be enough to hang you. But——"

"Do you believe me guilty, Mr. Herbert?" interrupted Ravensbird, drawing nearer with those penetrating eyes of his.

"I was about to say, Ravensbird, that you are safe for me," proceeded Herbert Dane, unmindful of the interruption. "I saw that you dropped the words in the heat of passion, hardly conscious, if I may so express it, that I was within hearing

to take cognizance of them. I was sorry for you at the time, feeling that Captain Dane's conduct was unwarrantable ; and I shall certainly not array myself amidst your accusers. Moreover, were you gibbeted on that oak-tree there, it would not bring your master back to life."

"Sir," repeated Ravensbird, his tone one of plain matter-of-fact, "I asked if you believe me guilty?"

"What a superfluous question ! Do you suppose there's a soul in the place that does not believe it, although you have contrived to escape your bonds?"

"Pardon me, sir ; I ask whether *you* believe it?"

Herbert Dane felt annoyed at the persistency of the man. "You ask me if I believe you guilty, when I have just said that I could hang you ! I do."

"Then why don't you hang me?" returned Ravensbird.

"I have told you why. I don't care to go out of my way to do you harm ; and also because it could not benefit the dead. But guilty, in a degree,

you certainly are. Not, perhaps, of wilful murder : it may be, that in scuffling so close to the edge of the heights, the fall was accidental."

The way in which Ravensbird stood his ground before Herbert Dane—hardy, self-possessed, not a muscle of his face moving, not a tremor in his voice, and his searching eyes never once relinquishing their independent stare—astonished that gentleman not a little.

"Then allow me to tell you, Mr. Herbert, that I am *not* guilty. Let me tell you something more, sir. Shall I?"

"Well?" responded Herbert, lifting his questioning eyes.

"I believe I could put my finger on the guilty man. As certain as that you and I are face to face, sir, I believe it."

"What do you mean?" asked Herbert Dane, after a pause of blank surprise.

"I mean, sir, what I say. I may be wrong ; I have no proof ; but I am content to wait for that. I know somebody besides myself who owed a grudge to Captain Dane."

Herbert Dane stared at the speaker from head

to foot, uncertain what to make of his audacious words, his still more audacious manner.

"You are thinking me too bold, I see, sir. But when an innocent man is taken up on a charge of wilful murder, some freedom in speech may be excused in him."

"Freedom is one thing, Ravensbird; falsehood is another. I believe you are telling me——"

"I am telling you the truth, sir," boldly interrupted Ravensbird. "I believe I know who it was, scuffling on the heights with my master, just as sure as if I had witnessed it."

"Oh," said Herbert Dane, and he was quite unable to help the sarcasm in his tone, "then you were not a witness to the scuffle!"

"No, sir, I was not; and for the best of all reasons—I was not within a mile of the place at the time. It has been proved, sir, that when that assault took place, I was at the Sailor's Rest, playing at dominoes—then, and for some time before it; and my lord and Mr. Apperly released me out of custody because there was no pretext for keeping me in it."

"If it was really not yourself, and you do

know who it was, you should say it," cried Herbert Dane, slowly.

"I judge otherwise, sir. I have no proof, and might not be believed. I prefer to bide my time. Do you still believe me guilty, Mr. Herbert?"

"Ravensbird, I do."

For a full minute Ravensbird gazed at him, as if unable to credit the avowal. Then his eyes fell, and he turned away.

"It may be that you do believe it," he said, speaking, as it seemed, more to himself than to Herbert. "In that case, all I can say is, that the time may come when we shall both be undeceived. I have sworn to my lord that I am not guilty, that I was not the assailant; I swear it again to you. Good morning, Mr. Herbert."

Herbert Dane was still looking after the man as he disappeared in the distance, when Mitchel and the supervisor passed on their way from the castle. Herbert Dane accosted the former.

"So, Mitchel, after all the reports current last night and this morning, I hear that you now deny having accused Ravensbird!"

"It was a mistake, sir, of people, saying that I did accuse him. I thought it was sure to be Ravensbird, I believe I said as much, but I never said that I saw him, or that I recognised him. That was impossible by moonlight, standing where I did. It appears now, that it could not have been Ravensbird, and I am vexed that he should have been subjected to any unpleasantness through me."

"Then you did *not* recognise Captain Dane's adversary?"

"I did not, sir."

"Mitchel's coat has been fished up this morning, Mr. Herbert Dane," put in the supervisor, desiring a little talk on his own score. "The waves must have left it high and dry on the beach last night, and Bill Gand's boat picked it up as he was coming in with the early tide. Captain Dane's hat has been washed ashore too; but, perhaps you've heard that."

Herbert Dane nodded. He did not appear inclined to pursue the conversation; and the two men continued their way.

"I'll know, at any rate, the real grounds they

have for letting the fellow off," he said aloud, in self-soliloquy, as he turned his steps to the castle. "Everybody said it *must* have been Ravensbird."

He had reached the gateway, when the hall was suddenly opened by Bruff, who was showing out Mr. Apperly and Sergeant Bent. Herbert accosted the lawyer; the sergeant walked on.

"We must wait a bit, Mr. Herbert," spoke the solicitor, in reply to a question; and his tones were excited and his face was red, for he had again taken up the notion of Ravensbird's guilt. "I can't question the good faith of the witnesses—I believe them to be honest; and Hawthorne and his wife, at all events, would be true to the Dane family; but that there's trickery at work is as sure as that you and I stand here. Bent knows it, he says. The hands of Hawthorne's clock were surreptitiously put back, or some other devilry."

"Ravensbird has just told me, with the coolest equanimity, that he was in the Sailors' Rest at the time of the fall; that it has been so proved to the satisfaction of Lord Dane," said Herbert.

"The insolence of the man!" apostrophised

Mr. Apperly. "He boasts of it, does he? In a manner it has been proved, and Lord Dane could only release him from custody; but our business will be to disprove it again. There are two awfully suspicious facts against him; Bent has been noting them. One is, that he particularly called their attention to Mrs. Hawthorne's parlour clock, with a secret view, of course, of getting them to observe that he was back at the inn by twenty minutes past eight; the other is, that he had been then away from the place for an hour and half, or so, and he refuses to state where he went to, or what he was doing. Let us wait awhile, Mr. Herbert!"

With a significant nod that spoke volumes, the lawyer hastened after Sergeant Bent. Herbert turned to Bruff, who had stood by during the conversation.

"What do you think of it, Bruff? Ravensbird asserts his innocence most positively."

"Well, sir, we don't—us upper servants—know what to think. If appearances had not been so much against him—that is, the quarrel with his master and his revengeful threats—Ravens-



bird is about the last we should have suspected. He never seemed a revengeful man. Then, again, the evidence has posed us: if he was at the Sailors' Rest, he could not have been on the heights."

"Very true," replied Herbert Dane, speaking in a mechanical sort of manner, as if his thoughts were elsewhere. "Apperly talks of a suspicion that the clock might have been put back—but I don't know."

Bruff shook his head. "If it was put back at all, it must have been put back a good three-quarters of an hour; allowing that Ravensbird tore back at top speed after doing his work on the heights: and I don't see how all of them could have fallen into the trap; one or two was safe to have detected it. Three quarters of an hour is a long space to be mistaken in, sir."

"Of course it is," replied Herbert. "It appears to be a mysterious affair altogether."

"Did you hear, sir, that my Lady Adelaide was a witness to the scuffle?" asked Bruff, who loved to talk of marvels as well as most people.

"No."

"It is true, sir. You knew about her having run in from the heights last night, screaming. Up to this morning she denied that she had seen anything; but when she was had into the hall before them all—my lord, and Squire Lester, and Bent, and them—she couldn't hold out, and told the truth. She had seen two men struggling, and one of them fall, and it nearly terrified her to death."

"Did she recognise them?" inquired Herbert Dane, some eagerness in his tone.

"No, sir, she did not. They have just had her in again, and put the oath to her upon the point."

"Put the oath to her!" repeated Herbert Dane.

"They did, indeed, Mr. Herbert," replied Bruff, dropping his voice. "It was quite cruel, I think. By what I can gather, Bent the sergeant asked that the oath should be administered, for he had got it in his head that she did perhaps recognise the captain's assailant, and was afraid to confess it. I hope they are satisfied now!"

"Did she take it?"

"Oh yes, sir. Knowing that she had not recognised the man, she made no objection, I believe. Sophie has been telling me about it. Her ladyship just saw the outlines of two forms, and that one of them fell; but she saw no more: and they might have known that, without troubling her to swear to it. She was only in the ruins, peeping out."

Herbert Dane lifted his head with an aspect of relief. "I am heartily glad she did not. It is not well that ladies—girls—should be brought into these things. What a pity they troubled her! If the scuffle took place at the edge of the heights—as we have unhappy evidence that it did—and she was in the ruins, it is scarcely possible that she could have recognised them. However, it may be a good thing to have set the doubt at rest."

Bruff looked at him, he was speaking with so dreamy an air: as if his thoughts were far away.

"Open the door, Bruff. I am going in to my lord."

In his chair of state still, but alone now, sat Lord Dane. He welcomed his nephew with more


cordiality than he had evinced to him of late. Great grief softens the heart. Herbert sat down and listened patiently to the heads of evidence which Lord Dane began to recount. He told it all, even to his having caused Lady Adelaide to take the oath, and Herbert did not interrupt it by a word.

"Do you think Ravensbird can be guilty?" inquired Herbert, when it was over.

"Ravenbird is guilty," was the peer's emphatic reply. "Every probability points to him. Put Ravensbird out of the question, and who else is there we can suspect? Harry had not an enemy in the world. All Danesheld loved him."

"True," replied Herbert, in the same mechanical tone he had once or twice used to Bruff.

"It is a most unfortunate thing that Adelaide did not take better notice, as she was there," resumed Lord Dane. "Bent thought she had recognised Ravensbird and was afraid to say it, or else was screening him for that Frenchwoman's sake. A ridiculous notion, and I am sorry I took it up. The fact is, the poor child was so utterly struck with terror last night, that she could not



get over it, and denied she had seen anything, which made me suspicious."

"In one point of view it is a good thing Lady Adelaide did not recognise him," observed Herbert. "It would have been most disagreeable for her to have to give evidence in a court of justice."

Lord Dane assented to this: and the interview was broken by the entrance of Mr. Lester, who had been sitting with Lady Dane. Herbert left the hall and went up stairs, hoping to find Adelaide.

She was not in the drawing-room, neither was Lady Dane. He was looking about, when he saw Sophie passing in the corridor.

"C'est toi, Sophie La Belle!" exclaimed Herbert, who had been a little given to decorous flirtation with the waiting-maid, and to plunge into his stock of French. "Where's Lady Adelaide?"

"I have no time for your nonsense this morning, Mr. Herbert," crossly responded Sophie.

"My young lady's ill."

"Ill!"

"Ill, and lying down; and I am going to the kitchen to make her some herb drink—which the

English know nothing of doing, poor ignorants. My Lady Dane is with her now, gone to have her scold out."

"A scold for what?"

"And my young lady deserves it," added the girl in her national freedom of speech. "Why does she go and upset herself and the house for nothing? If she didn't see anything beyond just the scuffle, why she didn't; she need not have made all that fuss. Va!"

With the concluding native expletive, Sophie disappeared, diving down the stairs towards the domestic regions. And Mr. Herbert Dane, seeing no good in remaining at the castle, took his departure from it.

But another phase in the story was about to be turned. As Herbert Dane was strolling along with the listless, leisurely air of one who has nothing on earth to do, he encountered a man well known in the locality—better known indeed than trusted. His name was Drake, and his ostensible occupation was that of a fisherman, to which he added as much petty smuggling as he could accomplish with impunity; his boat being

given to hover round foreign vessels, and bring away anything in a small way that it could. He took off his blue woollen cap, made after the form of a nightcap, to salute Mr. Herbert Dane.

"A fine horrid tale I've been a hearing of, master, since our boat got 'in!" he began. "Folks be saying as the captain's murdered, and his body gone floating out to sea, Davy Jones only knows to what latitude. Be it true?"

"It is an incomprehensible affair altogether, Drake," was the answer, "but I fear it is only too true. The body has not been found. They have been dragging for it all the morning."

"I see 'em," responded Drake. "Who was it attacked him?"

"Ah, that's the question."

"They be saying down in the village yonder, that it turns out not to have been the captain's servant; who was first took up for it."

"I know they are saying it. At least, I make no doubt they are."

"Well now, master, perhaps I can throw a bit o' light upon this here matter. 'Twon't be much, though."

"You!" returned Herbert, gazing at Drake.

"Yes; me. I had been up to Nut Cape, for I wanted to have a talk with old—that is—that is, I had been up the road past the castle——"

"Never mind; speak out, Drake," interrupted Herbert Dane significantly, in reference to the man's confusion. "You had been up to Nut Cape to hold one of your confabs with that old sinner, Beecher; that's about the English of it. But if I saw the pair of you pushing-in a boat-load of contraband goods under my very eyes, you might do it for me. I am not a preventive-officer, and I concern myself with nobody's business but my own."

"Well, I had been up to old Beecher's," acknowledged Drake, "but only for a yarn: indeed, master, for nothing else. I stopped there longer nor I thought for, and was coming back full pelt, afraid my boat might put off without me, when I heard voices a quarrelling. I was on the brow of the heights—I mostly goes and comes that way, instead o' the road—and was just abreast o' them chapel ruins, when my ears caught the sound. They come from the direction o' the castle, and I

cut across to see what the row might be. Standing on the grass, midway atween the ruins and the castle, was two men, the one was a speaking in a loud angered tone, and I had got a'most close to him, when I see it was Captain Dane. Seeing that, of course I cut away again."

Herbert Dane paused for some moments. "Where do you say this was?" he resumed.

"Between the ruins and the castle, a trifle nearest the castle, maybe. 'Tother man was a stranger."

"A stranger!" involuntarily repeated Herbert Dane, who had probably been expecting to hear that it was Ravensbird.

"Leastways he was a stranger to me; I'd never seen him afore, to my knowledge. A big, hulking sort of fellow, with a pack in his hand."

"What sort of a pack?"

"Well, I don't know; it might have been a box or a parcel. 'Twas dark and biggish. It had been on the ground afore I got to 'em, but the man, he swung it up in his hand, and then on his back. I didn't stop to take much notice, seeing

the other was the captain. The captain was blowing of him up."

"In what terms?" cried Herbert, with vivid eagerness. "Can you remember?"

"How dare you, fellow?" I heard him say, and that was all I caught distinct. But I heard 'em both at it, railing like, as I steered off."

"What time was this?"

"Well now, I can't be positive to five minutes," was Drake's answer. "Half-past eight, maybe."

"Drake, are you sure that it was a stranger? that it was not Ravensbird?" impressively questioned Herbert Dane, after a pause.

"Be I a otter, master, to have no sense in my eyes?" was the retort. "'Twasn't no more like Ravensbird than 'twas like me or you. 'Twas a chap rising five foot ten, with long arms and broad shoulders."

"You must speak of this affair before Lord Dane."

"I was on my way to the castle now to do it. I knows my duty. Not but what I'd rather 'go ten miles t'other way than face his lordship."

A smile crossed Herbert Dane's otherwise per-

plexed face. "He is not so indulgent to you suspected smugglers as you would like, and you fear him. But if you can help his lordship to trace out this assaulter of his son, it will no doubt atone for some old scores, Drake."

"Anyways it's my duty, having seen what I did see, and I'm not a going to shirk it, master," was Mr. Drake's reply.

He touched his woollen cap by way of salute, and proceeded towards the castle. Herbert Dane continued his way to Danesheld; he had a mind to inquire whether any later news had turned up. Perplexed, indeed, his face was, and he could not divest himself of the suspicion that the man, whom Drake had seen in dispute with Harry Dane, *was* Ravensbird, in spite of the description being so different, and of the pack.

"One's eyes get deceived by height and size in the moonlight," he soliloquized. "As to the pack Drake speaks of, it may have been a small valise that Ravensbird had been to the castle to fetch. On the other hand, Drake may be correct in what he says: that it was a stranger. In that case Ravensbird——"

Herbert Dane's reflections were brought to a summary standstill. Turning a sharp bend in the road, he came upon Mr. Ravensbird himself, seated upon a milestone that lay back from the path. He was in deep thought, and did not look up.

"You are in a brown study, Ravensbird."

The man turned abruptly at the salutation. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Herbert Dane! I was absent in last night's work, sir; that is, my mind was. I did not hear you come up.

"Ravensbird," returned Herbert Dane, a whole world of candour in his voice and countenance, "I consider myself bound to mention that your denial of having been the attacker of your master has been in a possible degree confirmed. Observe, I say a possible degree."

A peculiar smile, somewhat cynical in its aspect, flitted over the features of Mr. Ravensbird.

"It appears that another man attacked Captain Dane on the heights last night; at any rate, Captain Dane and another were enjoying a broil there together; and if the description given to me of this other be correct, it was not you."

The smile on Ravensbird's face changed to a

look of astonishment. He did not reply: only fixed his questioning eye on the speaker.

"Now, it is only natural to infer that whoever that man might be, he was the author of the subsequent catastrophe. A stranger, tall and broad, he has been described to me, carrying a pack on his back. Possibly a travelling hawker, who may have importuned Captain Dane to make a purchase, and was roused to anger on refusal. One fact appears to be indisputable: that they were contending angrily, and such men, loose characters often, have been known to commit evil deeds on very slight provocation."

"Who saw or heard this?" asked Ravensbird.
"You, sir?"

"I!" haughtily returned Herbert Dane.
"What a very senseless question! Should I, or any friend of Captain Dane's, keep such a thing secret? The man who witnessed it was Joe Drake. Not a very reliable gentleman in a general way, but I think he speaks the truth in this instance. I met him a few minutes ago, and he stopped me to tell of it. He was on his way to the castle to inform my lord."

"He has been tardy in declaring this," was the sarcastic comment of Ravensbird.

"Not at all. He could not declare it at sea, where he has been all night. He knew nothing of the accident to Captain Dane until he got in just now with the last of the tide. He was on the heights last night, coming down from Beecher's, and witnessed the dispute, or whatever it was. The time tallies pretty well ; he thinks it was about half-past eight."

Ravensbird made no immediate reply. His eyes were fixed on vacancy. Herbert Dane resumed :

"When you said to me that you could place your finger upon the offender, I assumed it to be spoken in vain boast, if not in deliberate deceit. It has now struck me that you also may have seen this encounter. Was it so?"

"I—I was not aware—that Captain Dane—I did not know of any encounter of his with a stranger," replied Ravensbird, his tones full of hesitating uncertainty, and his eyes still wearing the look of a man in a dream.

"Possibly this man was no stranger to your

ANOTHER PHASE IN THE NIGHT'S STORY.

master?" said Herbert Dane, scanning him searchingly.

"Possibly not," was the reply of Ravensbird, waking from his reverie. "It is not probable a stranger would attack him to his death."

"Still less probable that a friend would, Ravensbird. What is it that is perplexing you?"

"That, sir, is a question that you must pardon me for declining to answer. The more I hear of this business the more it does perplex me; I'll say that much. Danesheld may make very sure of one thing—that I'll not leave a stone unturned to unravel the mystery. It has accused *me* of being the offender, Mr. Herbert Dane; I'll try and make it eat its words before I die."

Drake's story, in so far as that such a man as he described had been in the neighbourhood at the time, was corroborated in rather a remarkable manner by Squire Lester. That gentleman had been riding home from a distance, and passed the castle about the hour named by Drake, half-past eight, or a little before it. Only a few yards past the castle he met a man walking in the middle of the road, and his horse shied at him.

“A big, ill-looking man, with a flat box strapped on his back.” Mr. Lester said he took particular notice of him, and should know him again, he was sure, for the moon shone full on his features. He turned and looked after him, and saw him quit the road and go on the heights. This was close to the castle.

Every search possible was set on foot to discover this packman. Lynx-eyed Lawyer Apperly turned Drake inside out, metaphorically speaking, and Squire Lester's description to the police was elaborately minute. All in vain. The man could not be found or heard of.

Neither was the body of Captain Dane. The drags did their work effectually as might be, but they brought forth nothing from the covetous sea. There could not be a doubt that he was indeed dead; and the Dane flag, usually a mark of triumph, floated in sadness half-mast high above Dane Castle.

CHAPTER VII.

MORTALITY.

MISFORTUNES never come alone. If a trite saying, it is marvellously often a true one.


A telegram was despatched to Paris acquainting the Honourable Geoffry Dane, with his brother's death, and letters more explanatory followed it. But when the missives arrived they did not find their owner. The Honourable Geoffry had departed from Paris, nobody knew exactly whither ; he had spoken of Italy, of Malta, and of other places. Upon this information reaching Lord Dane, he wrote to the family bankers, who were generally kept cognizant by Mr. Dane of his movements, desiring them to forward to his son the letters he enclosed. Which was done.

Herbert Dane meanwhile was taking advantage of this distressing calamity to renew his former friendly intercourse with Lord Dane ; to make

good, once again, his old footing at the castle. He had done nothing particular to forfeit it. Lord Dane had got into a habit of finding fault with him on the score of his idleness; Lady Dane had suspected that her niece Adelaide might be growing to like him too well, and both had simultaneously discouraged his visits. Lord Dane had offered to get him an appointment abroad. Herbert Dane declined to go abroad, and this gave some offence. Altogether, his visits of late had been rare—his welcome cold.

But in this sad event petty interests and animosities were forgotten. Herbert Dane brought to the castle any scrap of news he could pick up, and he was eagerly looked for and welcomed. He it was, apart from the police, who exerted himself to gain tidings of the man with the pack, and though he was unsuccessful Lord Dane did not the less appreciate the efforts. But the one great reward that Herbert Dane sought, he had not yet obtained—the sight of Adelaide Errol.

She kept her room for days; pale, wan, sick, timid; starting, as it seemed, at shadows. Lady Dane thought the fright that night on the heights



had in some way told upon her nervous system, and she called in Mr. Wild. Mr. Wild thought the same, and in addition concluded that she was grieving for her betrothed husband, Harry Dane.

It was no affectation, no imaginary illness; they could see that. She was sick in mind, and sick in body. But how greatly she strove against it, laboured to suppress its signs, was known to herself alone. Adelaide Errol possessed a stronger mind than most persons of her sex and age, a more indomitable will: and when, after the seclusion of a few days, she forced herself to appear downstairs again as before, the household noticed no difference in her, except that she looked wan and was unnaturally calm—a calmness that was rudely disturbed at a word spoken by Mr. Wild. Adelaide was sitting on the sofa near the surgeon and Lady Dane; she had been answering the former's questions, saying that she felt "quite well" now, when he mentioned inadvertently the name of Captain Dane. As if it had been the signal for some feeling, pent up within her, to give way, she burst into a violent flood of tears; all

her self-possession had deserted her, her assumption of coldness was gone.

Mr. Wild drew his chair until he was close before her. He waited until she was calm, and then laid his fingers upon the black crape of her wrists to give impressiveness to his words. Lady Dane, from her seat on the other side the hearth, looked on in silence.

"There is some great and secret grief upon you, Lady Adelaide. Take an experienced man's advice, my dear young lady, and *tell it*. When once these corroding sorrows are spoken of, they lose half their sting."

Her only answer was a movement of pain. She flung her thin hands before her eyes in very tremor.

"And when any self-reproach is mingled with the grief, it should above all be told, for it is in the nature of self-reproach to exaggerate itself; let silence be kept long enough, and it will become a very vulture preying on the vitals. Come, let me make a guess and help you. The angry reflection cast on you by Lord Dane has sunk into your conscience to torment it. Is it not so?"

He alluded to certain words spoken by Lord Dane in his burst of pain and anger, when he first became aware her denial, of having witnessed anything on the heights, was false. He reproached her with having been in a secondary degree the destroyer of his son. Had she told what she saw, so that rescue and help might have hastened to Harry, perhaps his life had been saved.

You have seen that movement of the body which we call "writhing;" the head bent and hidden in grief, the body swaying itself backwards and forwards in utter pain. Just so sat Adelaide Errol at the surgeon's words.

"You are right," she said, the tears streaming through her fingers; "in a secondary degree I am the cause of Harry's death, for I might have sent assistance to him in time, and I did not. It will be a burthen on my conscience for ever. How shall I bear it? I could not *live* if they took me up and tried me for it."

"*Tried* you for it!"

She took her trembling hands from before her face, and then saw that an additional auditor was present whom she had not expected. It was Her-

bert Dane. He had come in unheard during her burst of emotion, and was leaning over Lady Dane's chair in mute astonishment. As if his presence recalled her to sobriety, she flung off Mr. Wild with an intimation that the subject was at an end, smoothed her face to composure, and sat calm as a statue.

"I shall be all right soon, Mr. Wild. Don't talk about my health again, please; and Geoffrey Dane will be at home in a day or two, and the house won't seem so dull. He—oh, is it you, Mr. Herbert Dane? I beg your pardon."

She half rose from her seat to return his greeting; rose in too great a flutter, as it seemed, to see his outstretched hand. The interview was broken up. The surgeon, her curious word "tried" still echoing in his ears, went down stairs to pay his daily visit to Lord Dane—who had never ceased to be a patient, and was in a more precarious state of health than the world knew of—and Lady Dane descended with him.

"I am so glad to see you better, Adelaide," began Herbert Dane when they were alone; and he took her unwilling hand, but she drew it from

him again. "My darling, what has been amiss with you?"

"Please not to talk," she answered, in quite a mincing tone of affectation. "Mr. Wild says I ought not to exert myself."

It struck Herbert Dane as he retreated that she was under the influence of some inward and violent agitation; that this assumption of what might almost be called childishness was only put on to hide its signs.

"It is the first time we have met since that fatal night, Adelaide," he resumed, his voice full of tender confidence, "let me now say how deeply I felt for the terror to which you were unhappily subjected. You must try and forget it; time is a great healer of all things. And oh! Adelaide—"

"I asked you not to speak to me, please," she interrupted, in the same tone as before, but there appeared to be something the matter with her breath, though she was doing her best to conceal it; "I am sorry you came up."

Herbert Dane looked at her keenly. He crossed to the sofa and sat down by her side and essayed

again to take her hand. But she rose at once and went to a distance.

“Adelaide ! do you seek to avoid me?”

“I would like to avoid every one,—especially you, if you begin to talk of the past. I have taken a little drop of the waters of Lethe ; it is not quite swallowed yet, but it will be soon ; and then I begin a new life, and never, never recur to the past again.”

“Will you tell me what you mean?” he asked. He had risen and would have stood by her side ; but she immediately went away from him to her seat on the sofa. He put his elbow on the mantelpiece and followed her with his questioning eyes. She bent her head downwards for a moment, and then raised it with what looked like a sudden resolution, and there was a pink flush upon her cheeks.

“Indeed I am not equal to speaking much to-day. You heard what Mr. Wild accused me of being—a sort of accessory to Harry Dane’s death. Whether I was that, or not, can never perhaps be decided ; the fall of itself might have killed him. But of one other thing my conscience most bitterly

convicts me—cruel deceit. I must try and atone for it.”

“In what manner?” inquired Herbert, after a pause.

• “Well, I shall see—I scarcely know yet; real atonement of course there can never be. I hope you will forgive me for what you may deem caprice or unkindness; but, to begin with, I must request you never again to speak to me of—of love.”

“Adelaide!”

“It is all over. In these my few days of seclusion and sorrow, I have formed resolutions, and nothing can shake them. I will at least not continue the deceit to Harry now he is dead, though I was heartless enough to do it when he was alive. I shall see you often, no doubt; you will be here as a relative of the family; but I pray you henceforth to forget the past.”

“I think this shock must be turning your brain,” was his reply.

“Not so. My brain is as clear as yours. Don’t come nearer, please; you cannot change my resolution.”

“What have I done to offend you?”

"Nothing personally. But I will not be false to Harry Dane. I could not be so from very fear; I should think his ghost would come to haunt me. He was my betrothed husband."

"You did not care for him," returned Herbert Dane, regarding her curiously.

"There it is. Had I cared for him I might regret him less—if you can understand the feeling. I do care for him now."

"But not to wed yourself to his memory. Surely you do not mean that?"

"Perhaps not. I feel so miserable in this house that I think if anybody came and asked me to leave it with them I would go. Stay! not with *you*: you were joined with me in practising that deceit on Harry. I beg your pardon for saying this, Mr. Herbert Dane: I am afraid you will not understand my feelings, but indeed I cannot help myself."

"Adelaide, my darling, I think I do understand your feelings, and allow for them and pity them; they will wear away, as the nervous shock you have experienced wears. Not at present will I tease you or press you: I know that you love

me ; that you love no one else in the world ; and I am content to wait my time."

He spoke with tender considerateness. Adelaide flung her hands before her eyes : she did indeed love him, and no other. He took a step towards her, when in a sudden access of what might be called fear, as if doubting her own firmness, she rose from her chair and flew out of the room, nearly running against Lady Dane who was entering it.

"Mr. Wild finds my husband not so well this morning," she remarked to Herbert. "I think he is vexing himself, Herbert, at not hearing from Geoffry."

Lady Dane was correct in her surmise. Lord Dane was not only vexed, but angry ; there had been ample time, as he believed, for the Honourable Geoffry to have received the news and taken notice of it.

"Geoffry might have written at least, if he did not choose to come," he observed that same evening to his wife ; "it's just like him."

Alas ! Geoffry Dane came all too soon. Not himself, but what remained of him. He had

travelled to the neighbourhood of Rome, and on his arrival been attacked by one of those malarious fevers not unknown to the climate ; and in three days he was dead. The letter written by Lord Dane, and duly forwarded by the bankers, was not in time to reach him, and he died in ignorance of his brother's fate. His personal attendant, Wilkins, sent the unhappy news to Lord Dane. Even as he, the bereaved father, held the letter in his hand, the body was already on its way home for interment, having been embarked at Civita Vecchia.

How strangely solemn were the tidings to the aghast neighbourhood ! The death of the one brother following so closely on that of the other, seemed to bring with it they knew not what of superstition. Still more sad and grievous did it strike on Dane Castle. Almost before the half-masted flag had been lowered for Harry, it was lowered again for the heir, Geoffry. Lord and Lady Dane were bowed to the very earth with grief : those they had lost were their only children, and whispers went abroad that neither would long survive them. Upon Lady Dane, especially, the tidings seemed

to tell ; the servants gazed at her in fear, and said they could see the “changes for death” in her face.

On a gay morning in May, a hearse, whose sable hue and mournful plumes contrasted unpleasantly with the world’s sunny brightness, arrived at Dane Castle, having travelled from Southampton attended by the valet, Wilkins. The burden it bore was taken from the inside, and deposited in the castle in the death-room.

Why was it called by so unpropitious a name ? — a question frequently put by strangers. Simply because the room was consecrated to the dead. When a member of the Dane family died, the body was placed within it to await interment, to lie in state, it may be said, and the public were admitted to see the sight. The apartment was never used for any other purpose ; a cold gray room it was, perfectly empty, with a stone floor, and narrow windows too high for the tallest man to look through, and which were not made to open. Tradition went that when any one of the Danes was about to leave the world, that floor would become damp in patches : not damp all over,

as it did in wet weather. A silly superstition, said the wise.

The trestles were brought from their hiding-closet and set up in the middle of the room, and the coffin was placed upon them. Lord Dane was wheeled in in his chair, Lady Dane glided in and stood by his side, both struggling to suppress their grief until they should be alone to indulge it. One or two of the upper men servants were present, and certain workmen, who had been in waiting attendance, prepared to unseal the coffins.

At that moment Wilkins, suddenly becoming aware of what was intended, stepped forward, arrested the workmen by a motion of the hand, and addressed Lord Dane :

"My lord—I beg your pardon—but is it a safe thing to do, think you? May there not be danger? He died of malignant fever."

A disagreeable feeling fell upon all, and some drew involuntarily a step back. Lord Dane reflected.

"I do not fear infection," he presently said. "Let those who do fear it retire; but I will see the remains of my son. Stories have been told

before now of—of—others being substituted for those supposed to be dead.”

Wilkins turned to Lord Dane, astonishment on his face and tears in his eyes.

“My lord, is it possible you can suspect—”

“No reflection on you, Wilkins,” interrupted his lordship; “I did not mean to imply any. There is a difference between satisfaction from conviction of the mind, and satisfaction from ocular demonstration. I have no moral doubt whatever that my dear son Geoffry does lie within that coffin; nevertheless, I choose to be indisputably assured of the fact. Retire,” he somewhat sharply added to the servants; “and do you,” nodding to the mechanics, “proceed with your work. Had you not also better leave us?”

The last words were addressed to Lady Dane. She simply shook her head, and waited.

It was a long process, for the lead had to be unsoldered. But it was accomplished at last. The domestics had quitted the room, all save Bruff.

Lord Dane looked at him in a questioning manner.

"*I have no fear, my lord. Allow me to see the last of poor Mr. Geoffry.*"

Geoffry Dane it was, unmistakeably; and less changed than might have been expected. A long, yearning look from all of them, a few stifled sobs from the childless mother, and the coffins were reclosed for ever. Then they left the room, and the public, those who chose to come, were admitted.

A sort of fright, so to term it, took place that night in the house, one that caused some unpleasant commotion. It happened that Sophie was suffering from a cough; it had clung to her some weeks, and was very troublesome at night. She was in the habit of taking a soothing drink for it, made of herbs—tisane, as she called it; and this she carried regularly up stairs when she went to bed. On this night she forgot it: or it may be rather said that she would not go down for it—in conjunction with the rest of the servants, she felt nervous at passing through the long corridors, remembering what was in the house. She had been kept late with Lady Adelaide, and knew the household would be no longer below. But

no sleep could she get. Her cough proved unusually severe. At length, out of patience, she rose from her bed, determined to brave ghostly fancies and lonely corridors, and fetch her tisane.


Wrapping herself up, she started, carrying a hand-lamp. Her way led her down the best staircase, for she slept in a room adjoining Lady Adelaide's, and through the long dreary stone passage, past the death-room. How Sophie scuttered along, how her heart beat and her skin crept as she passed the door, she would have been ashamed to acknowledge in broad daylight. In common with the generality of French of her grade and class, she was superstitiously afraid of being in the presence of the dead—and they are more so I think than are Englishwomen—although she had boldly avowed to Lady Adelaide her non-belief in “revenants.” But there's an old proverb, “More haste, less speed,” and poor Sophie received an exemplification of it; for so great was her haste, that in passing the very spot, the dreaded door, she lost one of her slippers. With a half cry of terror at the stoppage *there*, Sophie snatched it up in her hand, did not

wait to put it on, but tore on to the housekeeper's parlour.

The drink was inside the fender, where it had been placed to retain its warmth. Sophie took up the jug and put it on the table for a moment while she drew breath (short with the running and the fright), and put on the refractory slipper. She was stooping down to accomplish the latter, when a noise close above her head interrupted her.

It was nothing but the striking of the time-piece on the mantelshelf, two strokes—one, two—telling the half-hour; the half-hour after midnight. But Sophie's nerves were unhinged, and it startled her beyond self-control. She shrieked, she grasped the nearest thing to her, which happened to be a chair; she hid her face upon it; and she wondered how in the world she could muster courage to get back to her room.

Back she must get, somehow; for the longer she stayed, the worse she grew. "If ever I leave my tisane down stairs again," quoth Sophie, "may a ghost run away with me, that's all!" She took up the jug, drew her cloak round her, and began



to speed back again ; not very fast this time, for fear of spilling the tisane.

Poor Sophie ! the real fright was coming. As she gained the corridor in which was situated the death-room, her hair nearly stood on end, and her skin was as a goose's skin, quivering and cold. A perfect horror grew upon her in that moment of passing the dreaded door. If you ever experienced the same uncontrollable midnight terror, reader, you will understand Sophie's. Her eyes irresistibly, and in spite of her will, turned right upon the door, fascinated as by the evil power of the basilisk ; had her very life depended on it, she could not have kept them away. In the same instant, a hollow, wailing sound, like a groan, broke from within the stillness of the room.

Nearly paralyzed, nearly bereft of her senses, Sophie fell against the door, and the movement caused it to open, as though it had been imperfectly latched : yet Sophie knew that the door had been securely locked the previous evening at dusk. But for the door-post she might have fallen with her head inside it ; that saved her. There came another groan, and what looked like a flood of

white light from the room; and the miserable Sophie, breaking into the most unearthly shrieks and yells, flew along the corridor, dropping the jug and the tisane with a crash and a splash! That those hermetic solderings and fastenings had come undone, and what they confined down had risen, and was after her, was the least of her imaginings.

Her cries ascended through the broad open well, as it was called, where a staircase had once been, to the floors above, and echoed to the length and breadth of the house. Out came the terrified servants; peal upon peal rang from the bell of Lord Dane; Lady Adelaide, a bad sleeper now, opened her door and stood at it, her face as white as her maid's.

When they gathered in the account of the shaking Sophie, some of the braver of the domestics proceeded to the death-room, and there the cause was made clear.

Kneeling on the stone floor beside the coffin, lost to all outward things save her grief, a white dressing-gown only thrown over her night-clothes, was Lady Dane. The groans of pain, of sorrow,

had come from her ; and the "white light," as Sophie had described, from her lamp. Not for a long while could they prevail upon the unhappy lady to return to her own chamber. In vain they urged upon her that she would surely catch her death of cold. "What matters it?" she murmured. "Harry first, Geoffry next? both gone, both cut off in their prime: what signifies death, or anything else, that may come to me?"

Geoffry was buried in the family vault, amidst much pomp and ceremony, as befitted, according to the world's usages, the late heir of the Danes. Lord Dane was too feeble to be taken to the funeral; the recent events had greatly increased his bodily illness; he seemed as a man shattered. The new heir attended as chief mourner, accompanied by hosts of friends.

The new heir, Herbert Dane. He it was who had stepped into the Honourable Geoffry's place, and become the presumptive successor to the title, to the rich and wide domains. Not less to his own astonishment than to that of his neighbours, was he there. He could not realise his position; could scarcely believe in it. Was it he himself?

he would ask, when he awoke in the morning ; was he really the man of importance, the presumptive Lord of Dane, or was he the obscure young fellow who used to sit on the gate mending his old fishing-rod, without a coin to buy a new one with ? At odd moments, a question stole over him, whether his heirship was sure. Every probability pointed to the fact that Harry Dane must be dead ; but it had not been indisputably proved that he was. Lord Dane said he had heard of such frauds as one dead man being buried surreptitiously for another. Herbert Dane knew that it was no very uncommon case for a man supposed to be dead, but of whose death there was no certain proof, to appear on the world's stage again. It was a notion that did not appear to cross the mind of Danesheld, but it certainly did that of the heir, unpleasantly so ; and it seemed to him that he would almost have forfeited his new heirship to set the doubt at rest, one way or the other. Lord Dane retained not a grain of hope : he believed his younger son to be as surely dead as he knew the elder one to be : Herbert Dane was now his indisputable heir, and from hence-

forth he was to be called by his second name, Geoffry. Geoffry was a favourite name of the Danes. From the creation of the barony, more than two-thirds of the lords had borne it, and it was held (another of their superstitions) that those who did so bear it were more lucky than the rest. Herbert Dane had been christened Herbert Geoffry, his friends calling him Herbert, not to clash with his cousin Geoffry, the heir. Now that the succession had lapsed to him, he was never more to be Herbert, but always Geoffry.

The words spoken by the servants, heedlessly, that their lady might be catching her death, when they found her on the floor by the coffin, were destined to be borne out more literally than such words usually are. Whether it was the kneeling so long on the cold stones in the chilly night, or the scantiness of the apparel she had thrown on, or the change from the hot bed she had been lying in, certain it was that a violent cold, accompanied with inward inflammation, attacked Lady Dane. Mr. Wild said it was pleurisy; the physician, summoned in haste from the county town, called it by a more scientific name; unlearned

people supposed it to be inflammation of the chest; no matter for the proper term, Lady Dane was in imminent danger.

She lay in her spacious bedroom, so redolent of comfort; its fire regulated that the temperature might be of a certain heat, its little luxuries ready at hand. The servants, moving softly in their list slippers, were anxious and attentive; the doctors were unremitting; the neighbourhood was concerned. *Could* life have been kept in Lady Dane by earthly means, they were not lacking; but when the time comes for its departure, who may prolong its stay? Lady Dane was dying, and she knew it.

On the third morning, when the physician paid his visit and was gone again, a rumour went through the household that the great man had said, in confidence to Mr. Wild, it was a case without hope.

"*She'll* make the third, then," observed Sophie Deffloe with equanimity. "I thought it would have been my lord."

"What's that?" cried the butler, turning his head on the Frenchwoman.

"Why, when two die close together out of a family, it's well known there'll soon be a third. I've remarked it scores of times in my own country."

"What a marvellous country it must be!" sarcastically rejoined Bruff, who was sincerely attached to his lord and lady, and could not bear the possible death of either alluded to without pain. "A nice place to live in!"

"Nicer than yours," retorted Sophie. "You may sneer as long as you like, Mr. Bruff, but you only look out. The captain was the first; Mr. Dane was the second; and her ladyship will be the third. Wait and see."

"Perhaps there'll be a fourth," said Mr. Bruff, in aggravation. "My lady's a trifle better to-day than she was yesterday: let me tell you that, *mam'selle*."

Bruff, not skilled in definitions, should have said a trifle easier, not better. Better, Lady Dane was not; easier, she was: but it was in the relief from pain that mercifully precedes death.

Adelaide Errol was sitting alone with her anut in the afternoon: the once careless girl seemed

more fit now for a sad room than a gay one. How changed she was since the night that had brought to her such terror, even strangers were beginning to see. Her brilliant colour had faded to paleness, her rounded form had grown thin; her spirits were unequal, her step was languid, her manner subdued. She sat in her aunt's invalid chair, her cheek pressed upon her right hand, her eyes fixed vacantly on the fire. Lady Dane was speaking to her in her weak voice of the future; but Adelaide, at the best, seemed indifferent.

"Come here to me, Adelaide," at length said the invalid. "Why are you so sad?" she asked, as Adelaide stood at the bed, a vivid blush dyeing her cheeks at the question.

"Child, I shall not be long here, and I would ask—"

"O, aunt!" interrupted Adelaide in a tone of pain.

"Do not distress yourself, my dear," was the calm rejoinder. "It causes me no distress. I have a Friend in heaven, Adelaide, and I know he will welcome me to his Father's home. The world has become to me too sad to live in. I

shall be *glad* to go from it; and my husband will, I am certain, very speedily follow me. He, in his bed below, Adelaide; I, in this; and neither of us can see the other for a last farewell."

"Yes you will," said Adelaide, the tears raining from her eyes. "Lord Dane is up, and they are going to bring him here this evening."

"Can they do it? Thank heaven for that comfort. But I am asking whence arises this strange sadness of yours? I do *not* think it is caused by Harry's death."

"It was a dreadful death, aunt," shivered Adelaide, shunning the question.

"Ay, a dreadful death," murmured Lady Dane. "Child! let there be neither concealment nor equivocation between us in these my last hours. I believed that you did not love Harry; that you would have loved Herbert had you dared. I should call him Geoffry now, but I cannot remember always, and it puts me too much in mind of my own Geoffry who is gone. If you do love him, there is nothing now to prevent your marrying him; and in that case, you need not go to Mrs.

Grant's, which would be a poor home for you after this. Tell me the truth."

Adelaide Errol was visibly agitated as she bent over her aunt, who had taken her hands and held her there. Speak she must, there was no escape; but even Lady Dane, dying as she was, observed how violently her heart beat.

"I do not wish to marry Herbert Dane."

"He is Geoffry now, Adelaide. He will succeed his uncle: he will be Lord Dane."

"I know. But I did not like Harry so much as I have done since his death. And I—I will not yet put another in his place. Herbert—Geoffry, I am forgetting too—I shall never put there."

"Then shall you make up your mind to go to Mrs. Grant's?"

"I suppose so. It will be very miserable, no doubt; but—O, aunt, I wish Harry was back in life! I would marry him the next hour."

She drew away from the bed in a fit of hysterical tears as she said it. Perhaps the contrast between the vision of being the mistress of Dane Castle as Harry's wife, and the home of discomfort offered to her at Mrs. Grant's, caused the

hysterics quite as much as any other feeling.

The excitement was not good for Lady Dane. Not that it could have much effect upon her now. A few short hours, and all of emotion, whether for good or ill, was over for her in this world.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET BORDILLION.

ABOUT half a mile from Dane Castle, standing almost at a right angle between the castle and the village of Danesheld, was the dwelling of Mr. Lester. It was a substantial red-brick dwelling, known by the name of Danesheld Hall, and but for its large size might have been mistaken for a farm-house, surrounded as it was by outbuildings, barns, sheds, rick-yards, and other appurtenances that a superior farm generally possesses. Its site was somewhat solitary, no houses being in the immediate vicinity, while the large wild wood at the back, ranging out and extending to some distance, did not tend to render its aspect more cheerful. The wood belonged to Lord Dane, it joined his shooting preserves, and was a favourite resort of poachers.

Mr. Lester's property was not entailed. It had come to him by bequest, not by inheritance;

and a good portion of his income was derived from his dead wife. A distant relative of his was the former owner of Danesheld Hall, and he made George Lester his heir upon condition that he should take up his residence on the estate, and make the hall his home. George Lester was a dashing young guardsman then, rather poor and very fond of life, and he knew not whether to be pleased or annoyed at the bequest. The fortune was most welcome, but to vegetate in the country and be dubbed "the squire"—he winced at that. However, we get reconciled to most things in time, and so did George Lester to this. He sold out, married, and took up his abode at Danesheld. But he still called it resentfully a "bleak place," "the fag end of the world."

His wife was a Miss Bordillion. That he never loved her very passionately, was known to herself as to others. He had engaged himself to her in the old days on account of her "expectations;" and when his own accession to fortune came, though his heart might have prompted him to wish the engagement cancelled, he did not allow himself to dwell on any suggestion so dishonour-

able, but married her. After all she brought with her no fortune. In her own right Katherine Bordillion possessed none. She was of a good family, but a poor one; there was a saying in the locality, "poor and proud as a Bordillion." She had been brought up by Mrs. Hesketh, a wealthy lady, who was herself childless.

The marriage was a happy one, Mr. Lester making a kind and excellent husband. Two children were born of it, a son and daughter. They were still young children when Mrs. Hesketh died. Her will was a somewhat curious one. To Mrs. Lester she bequeathed unconditionally twelve hundred a-year, funded property; of course it became virtually Mr. Lester's, and was at his disposal. It just about doubled his own income; but he derived other benefit. To the little daughter Mrs. Hesketh left a sum of fourteen thousand pounds; the principal was out, invested at large interest, and this interest was to be enjoyed by Mr. Lester so long as the child remained unmarried. There were other legacies, amidst them one to the son.

As the years went on, only a few, Mrs. Lester

began to droop. During her last illness, a distant cousin was staying with her, Margaret Bordillion. They had been girls together, close and tried friends since, and Mrs. Lester besought a promise from her that she would remain at the Hall after her coming death, to watch over and train the little girl, Maria. Margaret Bordillion was a delicate-looking woman of two or three and thirty, and the pink hue came into her cheeks as she thought of what the world might say, did she remain an inmate of the gay and attractive George Lester's house. But when death is brought palpably before us—and Margaret Bordillion knew that it was very close to that chamber, as she held the damp hand and gazed at the wasted face of Mrs. Lester—minor considerations are lost in the vista of the solemn unknown future upon which a soul is entering, upon which we must speedily enter ourselves, a little sooner or a little later; and we feel far more anxious to fulfil our duty in the sight of God, wherever it may lie, than to care about "what the world will say." Mrs. Lester received the promise she craved—that Margaret Bordillion would remain at the Hall to

take charge of Maria, at any rate for the present.

"And remember, Margaret," Mrs. Lester had whispered, drawing Margaret's ear down that it might catch unmistakably the low accents, "should any warmer feeling arise hereafter between you and George—it may prove so—should he ever seek to make you his wife, remember that I now tell you I should be pleased at it."

"How *can* you contemplate such a thing! how can you speak of it at this moment?" interrupted Miss Bordillion aghast, drawing up her tall, slender form. "You, his wife, can calmly entertain the notion that he may marry another!"

"The world with its passions are fading away from me, Margaret," was the reply of Mrs. Lester; "it almost seems as though I had already left it. George is one almost sure to marry again, and I would that he made you my children's mother, rather than any other woman."

Mrs. Lester died. It was two years ago now, and Miss Bordillion had remained at Danesheld Hall. But she kept herself very much in the background, more as though she were only Maria's.

governess, wholly declining to preside as the Hall's mistress. She partially regulated the domestic affairs, and gave her gentle orders to the servants in a timid, suggesting sort of a way, not assuming authority over them. She never officiated at table in the place of Mrs. Lester; when Mr. Lester had visitors, she did not appear at all, remaining in private with the child; and she more often passed her evenings in her own sitting-room than joined Mr. Lester. Maria was only eight years old at the time of her mother's death; had she been grown-up, Miss Bordillion would not have felt the awkwardness of her position. Some women might not have felt it awkward at all: but Miss Bordillion was of a modest, sensitive temperament, exceedingly alive to the refined proprieties of life.

What had these two years brought forth for her heart? Love. Thrown into daily contact with George Lester and his attractions, influenced possibly in the onset by the dying words of Mrs. Lester, Miss Bordillion had allowed herself, though at first in all unconsciousness, to become deeply attached to him. And when a woman's love has lain dormant for over thirty years of her life, and

is then awakened, it bursts into a strength and depth of passion that the young little know of. Timid, modest, retiring, Margaret Bordillion nourished it in secret, gradually giving way to the hope that she should be made what Mrs. Lester had suggested—his second wife. The hope grew into intensity, nay, to expectation; and her days became as one long dream of paradise. Better for her that she had detected the truth from the first—the dark cloud, looming ominously near, might not have poured forth its wrath so mercilessly on her unsheltered head.

One morning, but a few days after the death of Lady Dane, as Mr. Lester rose from breakfast, he remarked that the summer heat appeared to be coming on early, and they had better change their breakfast room. It was their custom to do so during the hot months, for the one generally used faced the morning sun.

“I will tell the servants to-day,” said Miss Bordillion.

When the son, Wilfred, was at home they generally all breakfasted together—as on this morning. Miss Bordillion's niece, Edith, was

staying with them. She was the only child of Major Bordillion, and had just been sent home from India, where the major, a widower, was stationary. Miss Bordillion received her at the Hall, and was looking out for a suitable school to place her at.

The two little girls, lovely children both of them, ran out to the lawn through the open window. Wilfred vaulted after them. His chief delight, when at home, lay in teasing the two, schoolboy fashion. In age they were as three steps: Wilfred was fourteen, Edith Bordillion twelve, Maria ten.

Miss Bordillion sat down in a remote window-seat to read a letter that the post had brought her, when she was aroused by the voice of Mr. Lester calling to her. He was in the adjoining room, standing at a window that faced the south.

"Look here, Margaret, I want your opinion," he said, as she put the letter out of her hand, and advanced. "Has it ever struck you what a famous conservatory might be carried out from this end window?"

"It would be an excellent spot for one," she

answered. "I think I have heard you remark upon it before."

"Very likely. The idea has been floating in my mind for some time. If I ever carry it out, it must be now."

"Why now?" questioned Miss Bordillion.

Mr. Lester laughed. It was what might be called a shy laugh; and his beautiful face wore an unusual air of embarrassment. The term beautiful sounds wrong when applied to a man; it was not so to him. His face was almost delicately beautiful; so much so that only the depth of passion, gleaming from his deep-set violet eyes, redeemed it from effeminacy. Margaret Bordillion's love stirred within her as she gazed at him, standing there in the rays of the morning sun. He turned his eyes full upon her, shaking off the embarrassment under a frank smile.

"It is two years now since Katherine died," he said, dropping his voice to the low tender tone that it always seemed to wear in her ear. "Should you be very much shocked, Margaret, if I were to begin to wish for some one to supply her place?"

How wildly her heart beat at the words, she alone knew. Mr. Lester's smile increased.

"And in that case, you know, we ought to get the old house brightened up beforehand. It wouldn't do to leave alterations until after. What say you, Margaret?"

Say, poor thing! nothing. Margaret Bordillion stood with her face bent down and her cheeks glowing. She was on a wrong scent altogether. Certainly she did not construe the words into an offer: she had better sense: but she did believe that so far as they went, they pointed to herself. George Lester was one of those men whose manner to women is naturally soft and tender, conveying unintentionally more than it ought. Margaret Bordillion may be forgiven that *she* so took it now; his slight embarrassment, a thing she had never remarked in him before, aided the deceit.

Mr. Lester waited for her answer, but none came. He saw the marks of confusion, of shyness: it was impossible that she could conceal them, standing facing him as she did in the refulgence of the bright morning, and he also jumped

on a wrong scent forthwith. He attributed these signs to displeasure: he thought she was feeling pained at the idea of a successor to Katherine.

"Margaret," he said, his tone one of persuasive eloquence, and he laid his hand gently on her shoulder, though neither the tone nor the action was born of tenderness for *her*, "I am so tired of my widowed life. Katherine is gone, but we who are living should not be wedded to the dead. Think upon this matter; and try and overcome your distaste to it."

Mr. Lester stepped outside and joined the children. Having broached the subject, he would not say more until she should have had time to get reconciled to it. And Margaret Bordillion? She remained standing, as he had left her, in the day's radiance, type of the radiance that was overspreading her whole soul. "I shall be his wife at last!" she murmured to herself: "his wife! his wife! How have I deserved so intense a happiness?"

But alas, Mr. Lester had not spoken of *her*. Had he been told that Margaret Bordillion took his words as applying to herself, he would have gazed out amazement from the very depths of those


dark blue eyes. He had been thinking of one younger, if not fairer—the Lady Adelaide Errol.

On terms of close intimacy at the castle, running in and out of it with the freedom of a son, far more freely than its new heir, Geoffry, Mr. Lester had almost made it his home in the day or two that had elapsed since Lady Dane's death. He took all the arrangements upon himself to ease Lord Dane; he spared him every care that it was possible could be spared. This had brought him in frequent contact with Lady Adelaide; and they had spoken together of her future plans, and what this change must bring forth for her.

To say that Mr. Lester had become attached to Adelaide Errol would be a poor phrase to express his feelings for her. He loved her with that passionately ardent love he had never felt or pretended to feel for his first wife; she had become the angel of his hopes, the day-star of his existence. During Harry Dane's life, this love had been in a degree kept under, not entirely; it had been allowed to show itself to her at times. With the strangely keen discernment of love in all that

regards the beloved object, Mr. Lester had detected that she did not care for Harry Dane; he fully believed that she intended to reject him, and was contented to wait for that time to press his own suit. The bare seeing her was as heaven to his soul. He knew nothing of any regard there might have been between her and Herbert Dane: that they had cared for each other never entered his imagination.

Lady Dane had foreseen the probability that after her death another home might be desirable for Adelaide. She could think of none but that of a distant relative, Mrs. Grant, a widow lady who lived in a remote part of Scotland, was very poor, and had a great number of young children. This lady would only be too thankful to receive Lady Adelaide and the liberal remuneration she would bring. To Adelaide herself it seemed a terrible prospect; purgatory would be nothing to it, she said confidentially to Sophie; but necessity has no law. The castle would be no longer a home for her. Lord Dane was confined to his room, and she was, as may be said, its only inmate.



"But surely you will not like going to this Mrs. Grant's, Lady Adelaide?" Mr. Lester had observed to her on the day following Lady Dane's death.

"Like it! I shall hate it beyond any earthly thing. But what am I to do, now my aunt is gone?"

George Lester's heart leaped up within him. The barriers of silence were flung down, and he there and then poured forth his tale of love, beseeching her to become his wife, the mistress of his home. She was a little taken by surprise, and her first impulse was to reject the offer, for she cared for Mr. Lester no more than she had cared for Harry Dane. But she thought of Mrs. Grant's remote home, full of discomfort and children, and checked the denial upon her lips.

"Will you give me a day or two for consideration, Mr. Lester?"

He would have been happy to give her a month or two, so that she did not reject him at the end. And for two days he said no more. On the third evening she spoke to him of her own accord, accepting his offer, spoke so calmly

and quietly that Mr. Lester might have known she had no love for him, but that a man in his position is blind.

"But you will not exact the fulfilment of my promise yet," she added. "In a year's time, perhaps. As your affianced wife, I can remain at the castle so long as Lord Dane is spared, and we shall meet constantly."

Mr. Lester was all too thankful for this. And he lay awake three parts of the night, projecting alterations and improvements in his dwelling, all for her comfort, all for her welcome: his children, his friends, had dwindled down to a very small place in his affections; there was no room for them beside Adelaide, she was all in all. No wonder he suspected not the true cause of Margaret Bordillion's confusion. He was going forth again presently to bask in the sunshine of her presence; but not until after the burial of Lady Dane, three days to come yet, was the news to be confided to Lord Dane.

And Margaret remained on in her dream of happiness, in the spot where Mr. Lester had left her, how long she scarcely knew. The

voices of the children, outside on the green lawn, were as balm to her ear; the tones of Mr. Lester, as he spoke to them, were as the sweetest melody to her heart. The entrance of a servant with some household question aroused her to reality.

Take a look at this servant, who rejoices in the name of Tiffle—Miss Eliza Tiffle. She is the upper servant at the hall, its ruling power; fair and deceitful in speech, but very capable in craft. A little stealthy woman, with a sharp, thin, reddish sort of face, and small sly ferret's eyes of a light green. She assumes airs to herself, and is dressed in an old silk gown, dyed brown, and white muslin apron. You might take her for any age from twenty to forty: perhaps she was about midway between the two. Eliza Tiffle had begun life as a kitchen-maid, had risen to be cook, had taken service with Mrs. Lester during her last illness as cook and housekeeper. So efficient did she prove herself, that her poor sick mistress looked upon her as an invaluable treasure, and bade Mr. Lester keep her always if possible. She was made housekeeper and manager only,

and a fresh cook was engaged under her. "Let her be the superintendent of all," said Mrs. Lester. But when that lady died, and it was found that Miss Bordillion was to remain, Tiffle went straight to her master and gave warning; there was nothing Tiffle hated so much as what she called "them half-and-half mistresses." Mr. Lester would not take the warning; he fancied that the house, deprived of both lady and house-keeper, would inevitably come to grief; and he raised Tiffle's wages, and told her she must stay. Tiffle consented to a three months' further sojourn, graciously enough in appearance, but rebelliously at heart. But when the three months came to an end, and Tiffle found how very little Miss Bordillion troubled her—that she had, in fact, more unlimited sway than in the life-time of her late mistress—she said no more about leaving. Truth to say, Miss Bordillion let her alone from simple dislike; she doubted her instinctively, and felt rather afraid of her. One of the sourest of virgins was Tiffle in her sway, liking to rule with an overbearing hand: she was neither of a desirable temper nor a kindly disposition, and

the servants called her "cross-grained." Tiffle, in her turn, hated Miss Bordillion; as a rule, she hated most people, but Miss Bordillion especially, for that lady was her ostensible mistress, and Tiffle saw that she was not believed in. Tiffle was one who could hate to some purpose, with her seeming fairness and her real crafty deceit.

"I thought I'd come to you, ma'am," began Tiffle; "might you be forgetting the orders this morning?"

"In truth I think I forgot the time, Tiffle," said Miss Bordillion, rousing herself; and her cheeks were so bright, her soft dark eyes so radiant that the observant housekeeper gazed at her with interest, apparently looking all the while the other way. "Mr. Lester was speaking this morning about making some alteration in this room, and I had lost myself in plans."

It was no evasion. Her blissful thoughts had roved even to that, and when Tiffle came in she was really planning out the conservatory in her own mind, with the way in which it might be best carried out.

"The butcher has been kicking his horse's heels at the door these ten minutes, and old Gand has come up to say he has got a lovely John Dory," proceeded Tiffle, sourly, for the neglect of Miss Bordillion had not pleased her.

"Get what you like from the butcher, Tiffle; take Gand's John Dory: for the rest of the dinner arrange it yourself," joyfully answered Miss Bordillion in her glad heart.

Tiffle grunted a surly acquiescence. Even this little command did not please her. She made a show still of deferring to Miss Bordillion, but that lady mostly replied by leaving all arrangements to her.

"Does master take his lunch at home?" she asked.

"I don't know. He has not generally of late, you know; but perhaps—perhaps he will to-day. Let the young ladies have mutton for their dinner, Tiffle."

"Master Lester won't eat mutton," said Tiffle, fiercely. "He told me in his insolence yesterday that he got enough of that stuff at Rugby."

Miss Bordillion laughed. "You can get him

something else, Tiffle. He is not often at home."


Tiffle would have liked to get him dry bread; and her last fierce rejoinder was not caused by resentment at the order to send up mutton for the young ladies, but at the sudden thought of him, that the mention of the mutton called up. He was a generous, high-spirited boy, but very aggravating where he took a dislike; and he and Tiffle had owned to a mutual antipathy from the first hour they met. That a certain innate repulsion to each other existed, unexplainable by any law save that of instinct, was all too evident, as the numerous contests proved when Master Lester was at home. Sometimes the aggression lay on his side, sometimes on Tiffle's; Miss Bordillion kept herself aloof from the arena, and the servants invariably espoused the side of the boy.

Tiffle, her business over with Miss Bordillion, made her exit, not by the proper door, but by the window—a French one that opened to the ground. She went about the house just as if she were its mistress, paying scant deference to anybody, except her master. Miss Bordillion supposed she

was going out to inquire of Mr. Lester, who might be still there, what his plans were for the day in regard to meals; but the truth most likely was, that she meant to fling a passing lance-shaft at Master Lester.

Which she did, to her heart's content. Mr. Lester was not there, and something she said, in reference to the boy's distaste for mutton, something especially provoking, caused that young gentleman to follow her to her own precincts and "have it out." Tiffle retorted again, and the contest grew. So loud did it become that Miss Bordillion was aroused, and deemed it well to hasten to the scene.

It might have made a picture for Wilkie. They stood in the midst of the back yard, between the servants' outer gate and the kitchen entrance. Tiffle, red, furious, shrieking, her little frame shaking with passion; the boy standing before her in a provokingly cool attitude, saying all the insolent things a schoolboy can say when he chooses. He was a slender boy, tall for fourteen; his face one of delicate beauty, his eyes blue as his father's. The servants had come out and



were gathered in an admiring group; the butcher-boy and Bill Gand looked on, and enjoyed the contest with a broad grin; and the two little girls, drawing behind them a doll's carriage, had followed in the wake of the boy and Tiffle; Maria Lester, a sweet child with timid manners, the same delicate features that characterised her father and brother, soft brown eyes and silky brown curls; Edith Bordillion, a graceful fairy, with light eyes, a laughing face, and fair hair. But the face was not laughing now; both of them were terrified, and Maria began to cry.

"Wilfred, Wilfred, what is this?" cried Miss Bordillion. "Tiffle—"


She was too late. Tiffle, with a shriek and a butt, flew up to him and gave him a smart blow on the cheek. Wilfred Lester did not strike again: he got both her arms firmly in his, and held her there powerless, gave her a slight shaking and a great deal of impudence. Tiffle was half mad: she had always mastered him hitherto, but the boy was now growing beyond her.

Miss Bordillion parted them. She touched Wilfred, and insisted on his releasing the woman;

and she kept him by her side while she inquired into the cause of the dispute. So far as she could discover, Tiffle was in fault; certainly she was the aggressor: and Miss Bordillion, really scandalised at the scene, gave her a quiet but most decisive reprimand. Possibly the foreshadowing of the full authority she might soon be vested with in the house, imparted to her the courage for it. Tiffle was utterly astounded, and an evil gaze went out from her little sly half-closed green eyes—eyes that Master Wilfred was in the habit of openly likening to a cat's.

“Her fault, Margaret! of course it was her fault,” denounced Wilfred, boldly. “She can’t let me alone. I shouldn’t have interfered with her if she had not interfered with me. She came shuffling up to me with those cat’s feet of hers, and attacked me sneeringly about my not choosing to eat mutton: the children can tell you so. I’m not likely to stand that. She’s not going to regulate what I eat: it lies with papa to do it, or you. My opinion is,” boldly added the lad, “that you have been here too long, Tiffle.”

Miss Bordillion drew the boy away. Tiffle’s



tongue followed him with some loud abuse. She was in truth in an awful temper; and a slight murmur of applause that arose amidst the servants at the boy's concluding opinion, did not tend to calm her.

"Yes," she said to the servants in her passion, "you'd like to get rid of me, wouldn't you? but you can't do it. Neither you nor that saucy reptile."

Driving the servants right and left, dismissing the grinning butcher-boy with an order to come again in half an hour, snatching the John Dory from the quiet fisherman's hand, she went indoors, and flung the fish to the cook. Mr. Lester's butler, a silent, civil man, the least aggressive of all, and who got on pretty well with Tiffle, followed her to the housekeeper's room.

"I'd not let my tongue run on so freely if I were you, Mrs. Tiffle," said he in a friendly tone, "especially before Miss Bordillion. You might find yourself the worse for it. It strikes me there's going to be a change in the house."

"What change?" snapped Tiffle.

"Well—though I'm not sure that I ought to talk of it—from a word the squire let drop to

me this morning, I think he is going to marry again."

"Going to—marry again!" echoed Tiffle, her voice subdued to something very like fear, in the excess of her consternation.

"Yes, there's not the least doubt he is; but that's between ourselves as yet, mind."

Tiffle turned cold all over; the conviction that the man spoke truth seemed to settle down upon her suddenly and hopelessly. She pushed back her ragged red hair from her bewildered forehead.

"Then it is to that animal, Miss Bordillion!" she exclaimed, striking her skinny hand upon the table. "The designing, crafty witch! making bones about sitting with him, and keeping herself away with the children, as if afraid he might eat her."

The butler only smiled. He had no idea Tiffle would do what she did do. But when Tiffle was exasperated she did not stand on trifles. Quitting the butler, she proceeded in search of Miss Bordillion, and found that lady in the breakfast parlour, applying herself to the final perusal of the letter, which she had laid down that morning at

the call of Mr. Lester. To see Tiffle with her shrivelled face of a scarlet red was nothing; but to see her come in with a bold step and her arms squaring was.

"I lived in the family before ever you came near it, Miss Bordillion," she began, panting with passion; "and I think that if this change was in view I might have been injected into it."

Miss Bordillion was accustomed to Tiffle's foreign words, substituted for native ones, a peculiarity of Tiffle's that afforded perpetual amusement to Wilfred Lester. She supposed this outbreak had reference to the recent quarrel; but did not in the least understand it.

"Explain yourself, Tiffle."


"I say it's a shame for them servants to have been inlightened, and me, their head, who ain't a servant in the strict sense of the word, to have been kept in the dark," burst forth Tiffle. "But when things is set about in this kivert way, it don't bring much luck."

"Explain yourself, I repeat," interrupted Miss Bordillion. "What are you speaking of? You forget yourself, Tiffle."

"It have just been told me by Jones that you and Mr. Lester are going to make a match of it," shrieked Tiffle. "He says his master told him: and, I repeat, I think *I* might have been made a confidence of, instead of him. It's not ways that I've been accustomed to, Miss Bordillion, I always had respect paid to me in all my places, and I mean to have it."

Never in her whole life had Margaret Bordillion been so completely taken to. Tiffle's insolence, Tiffle's passion, all faded away to nothing in the woman's news: it was *that* which took away her self-possession, and covered her with confusion. She blushed rosy red, she stammered, she faltered; bringing out some disjointed words that she "did not know," she "was not sure." It never occurred to her to doubt the suggestion that Mr. Lester had himself informed the butler, and in her innate adherence to truth she would not attempt to deny the fact.

"And so, as I've not been used to this sort of underhanded treatment and can't stomach it, I'll give warning to leave when my next quarter's up, ma'am, which will be just four weeks to-morrow."



Tiffle turned and went out with a flounce, having read the signs of love all too correctly ; leaving Miss Bordillion with a rosy hue on her delicate face, and lost in the sweet mazes of her delusive dream.

CHAPTER IX.

BROUGHT IN BY THE FISHING-BOAT.

THIS day was to be productive of an event, beside which the morning quarrel between Wilfred Lester and Tiffle, or that spotless domestic's subsequent onslaught on Miss Bordillion, faded into insignificance. As if to put a final and decisive close to any latent hope Lord Dane might inwardly cherish, and to set at rest the secret, tormenting doubts of the heir, the body of Harry Dane was found, and brought to the castle.

Adelaide Errol was in the drawing-room with Mr. Lester in the afternoon. He was talking to her about the very project he had mooted in the morning to Miss Bordillion, a new conservatory, and she listened with an absent, listless air, as if she cared not for conservatories or for anything else in life. Suddenly she lifted her head and listened. A noise in the road, unnoticed at first

during their conversation, had been gradually advancing nearer; it was as the tread of many people, and was now within the gateway of the castle.

Strange to say, there was a prevision within her mind of what it really was. She stood like one in a maze, her hands clasped before her, the colour fading from her face. Nothing was to be seen from the window but a number of people staring into the castle gateway. Without a word to Mr. Lester, she glided down the stairs into the very heart of the commotion. A dozen fishermen, or so, were congregated in the gateway, the outer gates of which had been swung to hastily, to keep out the crowd. They had carried up a sort of hand-barrow to the castle, on which lay a body, covered from view. It had been picked up some miles down the coast, and they brought it to Danesheld in their boat, scarcely looking at it, and never giving a thought to its being the body of Captain Dane. It happened, however, that Ravensbird was strolling on the beach when the boat came in, and he immediately, at the first glance, pronounced it to be that of his late master.

The features were unrecognisable, but he knew it by the teeth, and by a mark upon the right arm. Harry Dane's teeth had been of great beauty : white, regular, very pleasing in form.

Adelaide was unnoticed in the confusion. Several of the servants were gathered in the gateway ; the fishermen were gesticulating and talking loud in their rude patois ; Lord Dane, who was up that afternoon, had caused himself to be wheeled to the scene, and sat in his chair looking on from the hall door. Ravensbird stood before him, telling how he had recognised the body, and by what signs. If anything could have surprised Adelaide at the moment, it was the sight of Ravensbird. The fact was he had entered with the fishermen, and Lord Dane chose to hear what he was saying before he ordered him forth.

What motive impelled Lady Adelaide to dart forward to the barrow she could not have told ; possibly in that moment of agitation, of terror, she was partially unconscious of her actions. That she was under the influence of some all-powerful emotion, none who saw her blanched face, her wild eyes, could doubt. She gained the hand-

barrow, and was lifting its covering, when one of the fishermen unceremoniously pulled her back.

"It's no sight for her," he said, appealing to Lord Dane. "It's no sight for women, young or old; ye may judge, my lord, that it is not."

"Go away," said Lord Dane to her sadly but imperatively, after a moment's pause, given to the convincing of his own sight that it was really Lady Adelaide. "What brings you here?"

"You'd never get it out o' your sight all your life a'ter, young madam," spoke up another man, who had drawn close to the barrow to guard it from her, for he had daughters of his own. "And it's stark naked besides."

"Quit the scene, Adelaide; are you mad?" sternly reiterated Lord Dane.

"I think I am mad," she murmured, as recollection came to her mind and a flush of crimson to her cheeks. Turning hastily to obey Lord Dane, she caught the eyes of Ravensbird riveted upon her.

"Is it indeed Captain Dane?" she asked in agitation, halting by the man while she spoke.

"I am not sure, at this last of time, I should have said what I have said."

She went into a passionate flood of tears, and agonised in her own chamber. Sirine Lester, sitting in the garden at nine was passing below—she had not taken it for some petty summation—waited her return in the drawing-room: and waited in vain.

An inquest was called with fine speed. It was little more than a form, just to satisfy the requirements of the law. Ravensbird testified to the remains being those of his late master: Mitchell gave his evidence, also the man Drake. An extensive fracture of the skull, at the back of the head, was discovered, more than sufficient, as the coroner worked it, to cause death. The verdict returned was, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown;" and this proved that public opinion did not, as at first, wholly condemn Richard Ravensbird.

The episode related by Drake had been gradually making its way with the reasonable portion of Danesheld. Ravensbird's alibi was also so decisive, except to the prejudiced, that suspicion had

been lifted off him, and the man with the pack was almost universally looked upon as the real criminal. Somewhat curious to say, his non-appearance told conclusively against him in the public mind. Unless he was keeping himself in hiding, the efforts to find him must have been successful. The question now was, where was he hiding, and how should he be tracked when he came out of his lair.

Lady Dane and her son were buried together. And there was more true mourning for the Honourable William Henry Dane than there had been for the Honourable Geoffry. Again was Lord Dane unable to attend, and the chief mourner, as before, was the new heir.

On his return from the funeral, Herbert Dane—stay! we must do as the rest do, and forget the name—Geoffry Dane was met by a message at the castle entrance summoning him to the presence of the lord. Handing his hat, with its sweeping crape, to Bruff, he went in at once, and was shocked at the change he saw in the fine old face looking up to him from its mound of pillows.

"Are you worse, uncle?" was Mr. Dane's involuntary greeting.

"I suppose I am, Geoffry. I feel very ill. They got me up: I was hoping to go where you have just been; but I fainted, or something of that sort, and had to be laid down again. I want to talk to you, Geoffry. I have a charge to leave you: a charge above all other charges. You will fulfil it?"

"I will, indeed; to the utmost of my power."

"According to the arbitrary decrees of fate—how capricious, how unlooked-for they are!—you will be the seventeenth Baron Dane. Geoffry"—and the old peer laid his hand impressively on his nephew's wrist, and gazed at him from his anxious face—"I charge you, by all your hopes of happiness, to endeavour to bring to light the destroyer of my son! Spare no energy, no trouble, no cost; let not idleness overtake you at your task; be not tempted by want of success to relinquish it. Never take your secret surveillance off that man. Do you hear me, Geoffry?"

"But he is not yet found, sir."

"Not found! What do you mean?"

"You are speaking of the packman, are you not?"

"The packman!" ironically returned Lord Dane. "Psha! That tale has never, in my opinion, been worth a rush. You have heard me say so, Geoffry. Some travelling bagman, who encountered Harry as he was leaving the castle, and followed him on to the heights to induce him to purchase a cotton handkerchief or a horn knife from his store; and Harry rode the high horse at being importuned, and abused the fellow. That was nothing more, rely upon it. No; whoever dealt out death to Harry that night did it with premeditation. It was Ravensbird, Geoffry; and I charge you to look to him."

A shade of annoyance passed over the face of Mr. Dane. "I don't like to differ from you, sir; but indeed I do not think it was Ravensbird," he rejoined. "I accused the man of it at first; but that was before the evidence came out of his having been at the time at the Sailors' Rest. It could not have been Ravensbird."

"I tell you, Geoffry Dane, it was Ravensbird,

and no other. Do not you rest until you bring it home to him: it is my great charge to you. And now to another matter. Where's Cecilia? Has she come home yet?"

"No. I had a letter from her this morning. She tells me she cannot be home for a week or two. Mrs. St. Aubin is ill, and Cecilia is staying longer in consequence."

Lord Dane looked disappointed. "I wanted her to come and stay at the castle until Adelaide quits it for Scotland."

"Is it decided that she goes to Scotland?"

"Quite so. What else can she do? She can't stay on alone here. I wanted Cecilia to be with her until she went. Not that she's much more staid than the other. Adelaide came down amidst the crowd the day they brought Harry home: she was going to lift the tarpaulin to look at him. She's as wild as a March hare. Think of her running out on the heights that night!"

"She will not like to go back to Scotland."

"Necessity has no law," observed Lord Dane. "Mrs. Grant is a relative, and will take care of

her. Were Irkdale married he might give her a home ; but he's not."

"I think—I think, uncle," stammered Geoffry Dane, the flush of love dyeing his brow—"I think she would be happier with me. If you will sanction it, and pardon my speaking of it to-day."

"In what way happier?"

"As my wife."

"Geoffry, I had better be explicit with you," said Lord Dane. "You cannot suppose that since the death of my sons I have not cast my thoughts to the future of those who are left. My wife took a notion into her head some months ago that Adelaide cared for you more than she did for Harry ; but she said nothing to me of this until after Harry's accident. For my part, I deemed Lady Dane must be mistaken. Unless she cared for Harry, why should she have engaged herself to him ? But Harry went ; Geoffry went ; and you stepped into their place, my heir. In the last interview I held with my poor wife I spoke to her of this ; for I knew that the leaving Adelaide alone was her great trouble. I said that if you and Adelaide cared for each other, the marriage

would be a suitable one. And, to tell you the truth, Geoffry, I'd give her to you more cordially than I would have given her to Harry; for I don't like the idea of cousins marrying, and to you she is no blood relation."

"Well, sir?" said Geoffry, for Lord Dane had paused.

"Well, Lady Dane then told me that she had spoken to Adelaide and found she was mistaken in her suspicion. That it was Harry to whom Adelaide had been really attached, and she wholly declined to be addressed by you. Therefore I imagine, if you are indulging dreams of Adelaide, you are nourishing a chimera."

A proud, self-satisfied smile parted the lips of Mr. Dane. "At any rate I have your permission, sir, to win her if I can."

"You may have that. But there were other things I wanted to talk to you about, and I find I am getting exhausted. You'll come in again this evening, Geoffry."

Mr. Dane quitted the room and went straight to the drawing-room in search of Adelaide. He found her in the smaller room, from whose end

window she had so often looked out for him in happier times. She was standing at it now in her deep mourning, sad enough—not looking out—the sombre blinds were drawn to-day. She turned round with a start when he entered, and would have passed him.

“Am I scaring you away, Adelaide?”

“Oh no,” she answered, with a confused blush, and took her seat in Lady Dane’s large chair.

“I hear it is in contemplation that you should return to Scotland, to be with Mrs. Grant.”

“It was in contemplation,” she answered.

“You might just as well bury yourself alive, as become an inmate of Mrs. Grant’s undesirable home.”

She made no reply. She had her jet chain in her fingers, and seemed to be counting its links. Mr. Dane stood while he talked to her.

“Adelaide,” he resumed, his voice sinking, his face a little bent in his earnestness, “will you pardon the apparent unseemliness of my speaking to you on this day, at this hour?—your uncle has excused it. It is but a single word I would say.

You will let *me* welcome you to a home, instead of Mrs. Grant. As my wife—”

“It is impossible,” she interrupted.

“How impossible?”

A moment's struggle with herself, and then she let fall the jet chain from her fingers, and rose her head in sudden resolution. All her self-possession had come back to her, and her tones, though low, were firm as a rock.

“Because I have promised to be some one else's wife.”

Geoffry Dane turned sick at heart. He loved this girl with a passionate, an all-absorbing, an enduring love. The change in his countenance struck her with a pang of pain.

“I would soothe it to you if I knew how,” she said, in an impulse of kindness. “I would, indeed, Geoffry.”

“What has changed you?” he asked. “The time was, not so long ago, when we were scheming and planning how we could contrive to pass our lives together. You said that if I had but a few hundreds a-year you would risk it.”

"Don't talk of it," she interrupted. "The past is past."

"And the present is present. I can now offer you what I could not then; what I never—I solemnly declare—so much as glanced at the possibility of. I can make you—all too soon, I fear—the mistress of this castle and of these broad lands."

"You need not enlarge upon it; I perfectly understand. You would make me Lady Dane."

"I would make you Lady Dane and my dear wife," he replied in a tone of the deepest tenderness. "O, Adelaide, why do you look at me so? What misery has come between us?—what has changed you?"

"But I cannot accept the offer," she said, with measured coldness. "Geoffry, indeed all is at an end between us; at an end for ever."

His face was working sadly; he could hardly subdue his emotion sufficiently to speak. "At least you can tell me the cause of the change. *Why* is it at an end? O, Adelaide, my darling—"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "Such words are treason, now I am engaged to another."

It may be that he questioned whether she was dreaming, or whether she was playing with him. That she was in earnest he did not believe, and she saw that he did not.

"It is the truth, Geoffry. I am engaged to Mr. Lester."

Was his face turning to stone? It looked so in its pallor. Hers was flushing.

"Mr. Lester!" broke derisively from his lips. "Marriage with him will be, for you, worse than a mockery. You do not care for him."

"What was I to do?" she rejoined, in momentary self-abandonment, and her brow knitted itself in pain. "It was my one only alternative. At Mrs. Grant's I should have become melancholy mad. Are you about to curse me, Geoffry? For mercy's sake don't look at me like that."

"It was not your only alternative. Had you not me to fall back upon?"

She shook her head. "The fate of Harry Dane lies as a weight upon my heart," she whispered; "the deceit we practised towards him is

ever before my mind. I told you this once. Were there no other man left in the world, Geoffry, I would not be your wife."

"And you have no pity for me!"

"Yes I have. I have some pity for myself also," she added, holding out her thin wrists. "It has told upon me."

"Adelaide, I would far rather you had killed me."

"There are times when I wish we had all been killed together," she answered, rising. "Fare you well, Geoffry. Do not come upstairs to me again, for indeed this emotion is good for neither you nor me."

"A moment yet, Adelaide. Nay, you shall stay while I warn you. If you marry George Lester you will commit as great a mistake as any woman ever committed in this life."

"I think not. At least I shall risk it."

"So sure as that you and I are standing here, you will. You love me; yes, you do—this is no time for conventionalities, and I tell you so openly. A life with George Lester will be, for you, one long unsatisfied yearning."

"Yearning! For you?" she retorted, drawing down the corners of her lips, the words not pleasing her. "You are mistaken, Mr. Dane."

"A yearning for the escape from the existence you have imposed upon yourself," he said, with some sternness: "and there will be none."

"I will not hear this. The discussion is altogether unseemly now. You have but entered from leaving my dear aunt and Harry in their grave. You—"

Whether it was the sudden grief this thought occasioned, or that the interview was getting too painful for her feelings, she burst into a flood of tears. Mr. Dane would have taken her hands in his, but she drew them away.

"No, Geoffry, it is better not. I *cannot* be anything to you again, therefore do not tempt me by so much as a touch of the hand, it would but make my task the harder; we will not meet again until I am Mr. Lester's wife, danger will be over then. Forgive me for all," she sobbed, "and think of me as kindly as you can; you see that I suffer too."

He might have caught her to his breast, but

she was wiser than he. Given the absolute necessity of parting—which he, at least, could neither see nor understand—and she was acting as she ought. Before he could arrest her by so much as a look, she had escaped from the room.

And what of sunshine there was left in Geoffrey Dane's heart went out of it.

He sat awhile in the darkened room, his face buried in his hands, and rose up at length with a groan of pain. Descending the stairs, he went mechanically into the presence of Lord Dane, and told him what he had just heard—that Lady Adelaide was going to marry Mr. Lester. He never gave a thought to the fact that it was not his place to be the informant of Lord Dane: he was past sober reflection; minor considerations were utterly lost in the tumult of his great misery.

Lord Dane was greatly astonished. Going to marry George Lester! "Well," he said slowly, after some minutes' consideration, "it may be good for Adelaide that it should be so. She will want a curb-rein, unless I am mistaken—she's careless, heedless, full of folly—and George Les-

ter is of an age to hold it judiciously. *You'd* have given way to all her whims and caprices."

There was no reply. Lord Dane looked round for his nephew, and was startled by what he saw in his countenance.

"You are in love with her!"

"I never thought she would reject me," broke painfully from his lips.

"Be a man, Geoffry," said Lord Dane, in some wonder. "If she won't have you, if she prefers George Lester, you can't alter it; but don't sigh after her as if you were a love-sick school-girl. She's very pretty, and that's about the extent of her good qualities, in my opinion. *I* shouldn't like to choose her for a wife; she's unsteady as the breeze. Harry the other day, George Lester now! Forget her, and look abroad for somebody better."

It was good advice, to forget her, if Geoffry could but have taken it. Ah, what to him were the honours, the wealth that had so strangely come to him; what mattered the envy, the congratulations of the world, so freely lavished on

him, when the capricious conduct of one woman was breaking his heart?

But another's happiness was to be shattered. How contrary do things run in this life! Of the four concerned, the only one whose heart lay at rest was George Lester; he thought in his blindness that Paradise had fallen on him. Better for him that he had chosen Margaret Bordillion!

Miss Eliza Tiffle bottled up her wrath for a day or two after her onslaught on Miss Bordillion. Tiffle was quite capable of bottling it up for a month or two, if revenge needed. She never opened her lips until the Monday of the following week, and then it was incidentally.

She and the maids under her were at issue upon some point, as was the case frequently. Tiffle insisted upon her will being obeyed, and a scene of domestic rebellion ensued. The butler spoke to her in private; it was ever his way to make peace: would she give in to them? No, said Tiffle; as long as she was at the hall she'd let them know who was mistress; when she left they might do as they pleased; 'twas under four weeks

they'd have to wait. The butler was surprised, and an explanation ensued. She told him she had spoken her "free mind" to Miss Bordillion, and the man stood aghast.

"You surely did not speak of it to Miss Bordillion!" he exclaimed. "You did not accuse *her* of being about to marry the master!"

"I did, and that you had said it," returned Tiffle, triumphantly. "I told her that I was not accustomed to such sly goings-on in a house, and I gave warning on the spot."

"But," said the perplexed butler, "it is not Miss Bordillion that Mr. Lester's going to marry."

"Not Miss Bordillion!"

"Certainly not. *You* have gone and put your foot in it."

Tiffle's green eyes glared. She thought Jones was deceiving her.

"Who is it, then?"

"If I tell you, it must be in strict confidence, Mrs. Tiffle. When I spoke before, I did not know, though I guessed; but I have heard for certain now. It is the pretty girl at the castle, Lady Adelaide."

Tiffle did not like to make an idiot of herself, as she found she had done, and she flounced away to her own parlour and shut herself in. Down she sat for half an hour, reviewing in her mind the points of the case; and then she proceeded with meek steps into the presence of Miss Bordillion, who was at work in the breakfast-parlour.

Very different was this Tiffle from the outrageous Tiffle of the other day. She stood in quiet, humble deprecation, smoothing her hands one over the other, as was her custom when in a particularly deceitful mood, her false eyes shooting out quite affectionate glances at Miss Bordillion.

“What is it, Tiffle?”

“O, ma’am, I hope you’ll pardon me, and I’ve come to apologise humbly for what I said a morn-ing or two ago. That Jones led me into the mis-apprehension, and I should like to turn him away for it. If the whole lot went, ’twouldn’t be a loss. I find there was no grounds for kippling your name with my master’s.”

“Your words took me so entirely by surprise at the time, Tiffle, that I did not meet them as I ought to have done, or reprove you,” was the

quiet reply of Miss Bordillion. "Mr. Lester entertains no intention of changing his condition at present, so far as I know. Do not take up groundless fancies again."

"You see, ma'am, I was mistaken in the party," returned Tiffle, standing her ground. "I thought it had been you—for which I am here to beg a humble parding—whereas I find it's somebody else. But, Miss Bordillion, master *is* going to marry, and I'm glad to be able to tell it you, ma'am, if you don't know it."

Slowly Miss Bordillion gathered in the words. Had they meaning, or had they not? Her heart beat wildly as she gazed at Tiffle.

"I'd not have said anything to offend you for the world, ma'am; and a regular soft I was to think as you and master could have an idea of one another," went on the affectionate woman in a frank tone, the tail of her eye turned stealthily on Miss Bordillion and her changing face. "Over young she'll be for him, prudence may say; but none can't say she's not lovely; and Squire Lester—as is well known—has an eye for beauty. Not but what her hair has got a cast of the reddish

over it; may be you've remarked it yourself, Miss Bordillion."

"I don't know what it is you are talking of," was the poor lady's gasping answer.

"Not know, ma'am! why, of the Lady Adelaide Errol. It's her that master has fixed his choice on."

Margaret Bordillion's pulses stood still, and then coursed on with alarming quickness. Outward objects were growing dim to her sight; her senses seemed to be losing themselves in a sick faintness. But for a desperate effort of exertion, she might have lost consciousness.

And Mrs. Tiffle, after a consoling expression of sympathy, closed the door on the misery of the ill-fated lady, and went along the passages dancing a jig.

CHAPTER X.

THE LEASE OF THE SAILORS' REST.

To say that the news had stunned Miss Bordillion, would be feeble words to express the terrible blow dealt out to her by Tiffle. At the very instant that that estimable waiting-woman showed herself in Miss Bordillion's presence, the unhappy lady had been buried in a dream of the sweetest fantasy, picturing to herself the words that George Lester might even that night say to her. Since the morning when he broached the subject of the conservatory, he had said no more, but she had thought nothing of it; a great deal of interest, of commotion, had been excited by the recovery of the remains of Captain Dane, and Mr. Lester was full of nothing else. And there had been the double funeral.

She sat on, when Tiffle left her; her sewing fallen on her knees, her scissors on the ground.

Her whole mind was in a chaos of confusion, conscious of nothing save the one fact that it was not to her George Lester's love was given, but to another. The Rubicon was passed—it has to be passed by most women once in their lives—and Miss Bordillion found its waves all the worse to battle with from her tardy crossing. She had entered on a new life, a new way, and must henceforth traverse it. Behind her were sweet and sunny Arcadian plains; stretching out before her were rude rocks and sharp thorns, a rugged, toilsome, endless road, and a lowering sky. She would do well not to look back while she toiled wearily along it.

To doubt the news, never occurred to her; she felt sure that it was true. It explained various little items she had observed lately in the conduct and movements of Mr. Lester which had rather puzzled her. Even then, in the first dawn of her agony, she looked the matter full in the face, shrinking from it, it is true, but persevering with the scrutiny. Better for her that she should do so. Her own plans would have to be decided upon, for if the young Lady Adelaide was to be

brought to the house, his wife, she must quit it. She thought of it for the whole of the remaining day, giving no sign of her pain, save that now and then a sort of suppressed sob broke from her with a wailing sound. The children inquired if she felt ill, but she answered no. Mr. Lester did not come home to dinner, and she supposed that he had remained at the Castle with Lord Dane, as he did sometimes, without warning them at home. Ah! she knew now what his attraction was there. She sat up until he came home; not in her own sitting-room, as was mostly her custom, but in the library, waiting for him.

It was striking eleven when he entered. He came in wiping his forehead, and saying something about the warmth of the evening, calling out to the butler to bring him in a bottle of soda-water. Then he caught sight of Miss Bordillion, and greeted her with a gay laugh.

"Why, Margaret, this is dissipation! Eleven o'clock, and you sitting up!"

She could not answer. The task which had seemed tolerably easy in prospective, the very words of which she had conned over and over to

herself in the last hour, was as an impossible one now. She sat close to a small shaded lamp, away from the glare of the chandelier, and was ostensibly sewing. That was nothing unusual; some work or other, generally plain useful work, was mostly to be seen in the hands of Miss Bordillion. As yet she kept silence, striving to school down her manner to indifference, collecting her energies to speak with calmness. Mr. Lester continued, noticing nothing:

“I’m sure this is much more sensible of you than dancing off to bed with the birds, or shutting yourself up in your own parlour, leaving an empty room to welcome me. I can’t think why you should do so, Margaret; just as if you were afraid of me.”

Speak she must: yet how subdue the agitation that gained upon her; how hide it? Her heart was beating in great thumps against her side; her face was white, her lips were dry. Suddenly she rose from her seat and went to a side table, on which was a little workbox of Maria’s; she stood there rummaging amidst its contents, her back to Mr. Lester. And then she managed to bring out

the words she wished to say, or some that did for them.

• “I have been hearing some news to-day; and I thought I would wait up to ask you whether it was true. On these warm evenings, too, it is agreeable to sit up late. The heat appears to be coming in early.”

“What momentous news have you been hearing now? That the Thames has taken fire?”

“Something nearer home,” she answered, shrinking with pain from his light, careless manner: it seemed as a very mockery on her own misery. “I have been told that you are going”—a sudden cough took her and she had to pause—“to marry Lady Adelaide Errol.”

“Now who in the world could have given you that piece of news?” demanded Mr. Lester, his tone full of banter still.

“It came from Jones.”

“From Jones!”

“At least, I think so. It was Tiffle who mentioned it to me, and I think she said Jones was her informant. I am not sure, but she said”—poor Miss Bordillion was confusing the two

interviews together, Tiffle's first news and her second—"Jones had it from you."

"The notion of Miss Bordillion's listening to the gossip of servants!" was his laughing retort. "I thought you were a wiser woman, Margaret."

Margaret stood over the workbox still; she seemed to be dropping no end of things, and picking them up again; reels of cotton, scissors, wax. She did not dare to turn her face round in its terrible agitation. At that juncture the butler came in with the soda-water.

"So, Jones," began Mr. Lester, "you have been making free with Lady Adelaide Errol's name, I hear, in conjunction with mine."

Jones nearly dropped the waiter in his consternation. The bottle and the glass clashed together as he laid them on the table. He stared at his master, and turned crimson and purple, and stuttered and stammered; but not a connected word of excuse or denial could Jones bring out.

"Pray from whom did you get your information?" continued Mr. Lester.

"Sir, I'm sure I beg your pardon if it is not correct; or if I ought not to have mentioned it;

but I only did so to Tiffle in strict confidence. I got it, sir, from Mr. Dane."

"From Mr. Dane!" repeated Squire Lester, surprise causing him to echo the words.

"From Mr. Geoffry Dane, sir. It was in this way. Yesterday evening I was near the Castle and met Mr. Dane. He stopped to speak to me; He's always affable and pleasant; and just then, Lady Adelaide, in her deep mourning, passed us on her way from church, her maid and Bruff behind her: and it was the first time she had been out, I fancy, since the commencement of the troubles. 'She's a winsome young thing, sir,' I said to Mr. Dane, when he was putting on his hat, which he had taken off to her, 'as good as a sunbeam.' 'It's a sunbeam you'll soon have shining on you, Jones,' said he: 'in a short while she leaves the Castle for your master's house, changing her name to his.' Mr. Dane looked so queer when he said it."

Squire Lester turned his gaze on his servant. "Queer! How 'queer?' What do you mean, Jones?"

"Well, sir, I can hardly describe. There was

a curious look in his face, and the corners of his lips were drawn down. It gave an air of ridicule to what he said."

Jones paused. But Mr. Lester made no immediate rejoinder.

"And I certainly did speak of it this afternoon to Tiffle, but I cautioned her not to mention it again," went on Jones. "I know I ought not to have repeated it, sir, and I'm very sorry; but Mr. Dane spoke of it quite openly to me. Shall I contradict it, sir?"

"O dear no," carelessly replied Squire Lester. "Leave the soda-water. I'll put it out myself."

"The tale-bearing she-ferret!" said Mr. Jones, as he withdrew, anathematising the offending Tiffle in his rage. "Many a master might have turned me away for it. If she stops here, I'll not."

Miss Bordillion had been gaining some composure during the colloquy. She turned to Mr. Lester.

"It is true, then?"

"Yes, it is true, Margaret," he answered, his manner changing to seriousness.

"I think you ought to have told me."

"Of course I ought. I meant to tell you to-morrow morning. What I said the other day was intended as a herald of preparation. I have lost no time, for it is only to-day that things have been settled with Lord Dane, and how Mr. Herbert—Geoffry, I mean—came to be so early wise, I can't tell. It does not matter."

"Is the marriage very near?" she asked, in a low tone.

"That I cannot tell you. Adelaide said something about waiting for a twelvemonth, but when I spoke to Lord Dane to-day, he expressed a wish that it should take place as soon as possible. Some compromise will be effected, I suppose, between the two."

"At any rate, you will give me notice of the time as soon as you know it yourself?" she rejoined. "But I can begin to set about my plans at once."

"What plans?"

"For quitting the Hall, and getting another residence."

Mr. Lester paused: there was a sort of blank look upon his face.

"What are you thinking of now, Margaret? You need not quit the Hall."

"Nay, I should rather ask what you are thinking of," she rejoined. "I shall certainly leave the house quite free for Lady Adelaide."

"The house is large enough for you and for Adelaide. She will not be putting you out of your place as mistress, because you have never assumed it. You can remain here precisely as you have hitherto done."

"No, Mr. Lester; it is impossible. Before you bring home your wife, I shall make room for her."

"Margaret," he said, in a low tone, "I do not forget that you promised Katherine to supply her place to Maria; to be in a sense, the child's second mother. Are you forgetting it?"

A flush of pain dyed her face, called up by the association the words conveyed. She laid her hand upon her bosom to still its beating.

"You are bringing home Maria's second mother in Lady Adelaide."

"Nonsense, Margaret! Adelaide is little bet-

ter than a child herself; how could she fulfil the duties of a mother to a girl of Maria's age? I should not think of saddling her with the charge of a child for whom she does not as yet care. When she shall have children of her own, experience will come with them. Margaret, how can you talk of parting with Maria, loving her so greatly as you do?"

That it would bring her more grief than she was prepared to speak of, Margaret Bordillion knew. Mr. Lester resumed:

"By your own desire, you have been taking the place of governess to Maria; for the last two years it is you alone who have instructed her, assisted by the different masters. You must remember, Margaret, that I did not fall in very readily with the plan; I thought it was a task that ought not to be imposed upon you. You met my objection with certain arguments: one was, that you were perfectly competent to instruct her, and possessed an innate fitness and liking for the employment; another was, that you objected to a young girl's being consigned to strange governesses, of whom we knew nothing; a third was,

your promise to Katherine personally to watch over Maria. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I would remind you that those arguments exist still in the same force. By leaving the Hall, you would abandon Maria to a hired governess, you would forfeit your promise to Katherine. Margaret, dear Margaret," and Mr. Lester took her hands in his, "do not think of this: at any rate for the present. It will be time enough after Lady Adelaide comes home, if you then find that you do not care to remain. I ask you for Maria's sake, be not hasty in this. Remember how Katherine left her to you."

She withdrew her hands, calmly and quietly; though her chest was heaving, her face was working; and Mr. Lester saw the emotion. But he was on that wrong scent of his still: he thought she was vexed and agitated at his replacing his first wife by a second.

"We will talk further of this another time," she said; "it is getting late now." And rolling up her work as if she had not a minute left to do it in, she hurried from the room.

"Plenty of time," repeated Mr. Lester to himself, as he took up the bottle of soda-water. "And I'm not at all sorry that those meddlers paved the way for me. The idea of Margaret's taking it up in this light! I never saw her so ruffled. It's just like women and their romance, to fancy when a man loses his wife he should remain wedded to her grave: they've no common sense. And in my case—when Margaret knows I had no love for my wife, only esteem—pssha! she'll come to her senses. I think I'll have a dash of brandy in this soda-water," he concluded, ringing the bell for Jones.

Miss Bordillion went straight to her chamber, and sat down to think. What should she do? What ought she to do? She was a woman greatly alive to the dictates of conscience, one who was most anxious, even at a self-sacrifice, to faithfully perform whatever duty fell to her. And the appeal from Mr. Lester in regard to Maria had touched her conscience.

"I did promise Katherine. I said I would never abandon the child to a school, or to a governess without my supervision. Should I put my

own pain, my chilled feelings, in comparison with this?" she continued, deliberately questioning herself. "I deserve this punishment. What right had I to assume he was going to ask *me* to be his wife, because I had madly suffered myself to become attached to him? Yes, I deserve it! Let me take it upon me, and bear it in silence as I best may."

She sat on to the little hours of the morning, battling with her grievous trial. Before she rose, she made a kind of compromise between her feelings and her conscience. She said to herself that she would not hurry away at once, as she had thought to do. She would wait in the house until the marriage. And then, while Mr. Lester and his bride were absent on the customary tour, she would quit it. It is possible that that holding back from entering upon a distasteful change, which we all are apt to feel, insensibly induced her to this compromise. And Margaret Bordillion was very poor, knowing not in truth how she could live when she quitted the Hall.

Lord Dane took a turn for the better, to the secret surprise of Mr. Wild. That gentleman

at least knew that his life could not be very much prolonged. But medical men assume that it is not in their province to proclaim this to their patients, and the surgeon of Danesheld was no exception.

A wonderful turn for the better. He was got up now in a morning early, as he had used to be ere the troubles fell upon him; he was even taken out in his chair in the charming weather. Squire Lester would walk on one side it, Adelaide on the other. Occasionally he would be accompanied by Geoffry Dane; and at those times Lady Adelaide was never there. But this improvement lasted but a week or two: Mr. Wild could have told it was deceitful from the first.

He took to his bed, from which he was destined never more to rise. In common with most chronic invalids, he did not seem to anticipate death. That death would certainly be his ending at no distant period, he had a knowledge of in what may be called a general way; but he did not look out for its being very close at hand. For the matter of that, neither did the surgeon: his malady was such that he might be taken off

at any minute, or live six months yet. He strongly urged upon Adelaide that her marriage should take place: the Castle would be Geoffry Dane's home the moment the breath went out of his body, he said, and not a suitable residence for her. Mr. Lester did his part towards seconding the mandate: he had the license in readiness, a special one; he besought Adelaide to waive form and ceremony, and to accede. It was of no avail; Adelaide would not listen, and he might as well have talked to the wind. She was in deep mourning, she objected, and her aunt and Harry were but just buried.

"You will go to church and give her away, Geoffry," Lord Dane said to his nephew. "She is holding back now; but it won't last for long. It's all mock modesty."

Geoffry Dane's face flushed with some indescribable feeling. He passed his hand across his brow carelessly, to hide it from Lord Dane.

"No, I would rather not," he answered in a low firm tone. "If she marries George Lester, why—let her marry him; but I will not take act or part in it."

"You are very foolish, Geoffry."

"I daresay I am. Let her send for Lord Irkdale."

"That's easier said than done. Irkdale dare not put his foot in England on account of his debts. Never mind; we shall find somebody else."

One day Lord Dane sent for the lawyer, Apperly. He had several things to speak to him upon; but he had been putting it off from time to time, as he would *not* have put it off had he given a suspicion to the thought that death might be very near. Still, no long time had elapsed, and Lord Dane probably thought none had been lost.

First of all, Lord Dane spoke of his will. He wished a fresh one made. The death of his sons enabled him to bequeath legacies to whom he would; and he directed that such should be left to Lady Adelaide, to Cecilia Dane, to his servants, and to others. But they were not of great value; for of available property Lord Dane had but little: nearly all went with the entail.

Mr. Apperly listened to his instructions in silence. "Have you forgotten, my lord," he asked,

"that you are the heir to your son, Captain Dane? He must have left a great deal of money."

Lord Dane shook his head. "We shall not one of us here benefit by that, Apperly, however much it may be. One day when we were speaking upon money matters—it was the day he told me, poor fellow, of his love for Adelaide Errol, and his wish to marry her—I asked him if it had ever occurred to him to make a will. I think you knew all his money was invested in different securities over in America?" broke off Lord Dane.

"Yes, I knew that."

"Ay: he replied to me that his will had been made long ago, and was in safety in America. All he possessed was bequeathed to American friends, he added; and I could not help telling him he might have been more brotherly and remembered Geoffry. But they were never cordial, as you know. No, Apperly; if I were starving for want of a pound, it could not come to me now from Harry's funds. I sha'n't live to want any of them, and Geoffry's dead: otherwise it would worry me enough, so much money going out of the family."

"But, had he lived to marry Lady Adelaide, he would surely have cancelled this will!" cried Mr. Apperly.

"Of course he would. He said so. But he did not live to marry her, and it was never done."

The lawyer took his instructions home with him. The next day, somewhat to Lord Dane's surprise, he was up at the Castle again.

"Already!" cried his lordship, who seemed unusually drowsy. "Is it ready? There was no such hurry. I'm not likely to go off like the snuff of a candle."

"It will be ready this afternoon, my lord, and I will bring it up for execution whenever you please. But I did not come about the will now," continued Mr. Apperly; "I came about another matter. Hawthorne wants to quit the Sailors' Rest."

"What does he want that for?" questioned Lord Dane.

"You may remember that his two brothers went over to Australia some three or four years ago. It seems they have done very well there, and they want Hawthorne and his wife to join

them. The man has been rather shilly-shallying over it these several weeks past—I will, and I won't—and now he has made his mind up all in a hurry: as is the case generally in these matters. He'd like to be off at once; next week, if possible, and—"

"A man and woman can't get off on a four or five months' voyage, to take up their abode in a new country, without more preparation than that," interposed Lord Dane.

"They are not going to sail quite so soon," explained Mr. Apperly. "Hawthorne's sister Keziah, once nursemaid at Squire Lester's, married a London tradesman, as your lordship may remember. A baker, he was, I think. They are going; and they want Hawthorne and his wife to join them in London as soon as may be, that all may make their preparations together. Hawthorne has been to me over it, asking whether your lordship will release him from his lease."

"I don't know about that," said his lordship, who had never been a particularly easy man with his tenants.

"He'll do little good, stopping," returned Mr.

Apperly. "Since the last letter came from Australia, enlarging on the fortune his brothers are making, Hawthorne's brain has been so filled with golden visions, that he knows not whether he stands on his head or his heels. But he came to me again this morning, saying he had got a tenant for the Sailors' Rest."

"Ah," said Lord Dane, "it's a good house, and twenty will be after it as soon as the news gets wing. Any steady man may make an excellent living there. Hawthorne will do well to think twice before he gives it up."

"I have told him so. But you see that sun, my lord, up in the heavens; you might just as well try to turn that from the earth as to turn Hawthorne from his new project. His wife is more wildly bent on it, if possible, than he. She has got her boxes ready packed, to be off to London as soon as they obtain their release, leaving Hawthorne behind her to wind things up."

"What would they do with their furniture and fixtures?"

"Whoever takes to the house must take to them. He puts the value down at 600*l*. alto-

gether ; furniture, fixtures, stock, lease, and goodwill ; and it's not too much. One man is after it who would make a good tenant—Mitchel."

"Mitchel!" echoed Lord Dane. "What could he do with a public-house? And where's his money?"

"Your lordship is thinking of the preventive man. I allude to his brother—John Mitchel."

"Oh, ay, I forgot him. Yes; he would be a good tenant, and could pay Hawthorne the money down. Well, I leave it to you, Apperly. If Hawthorne finds me a suitable tenant, why, I'll release him."

"Very good, my lord."

"Before the bargain is actually struck; that is, before anything is signed, let the name of the new tenant be submitted to me formally. I like to approve of my tenants."

"It shall be so," said Mr. Apperly. "But I suppose I may allow the negotiations with John Mitchel to go on? Hawthorne and he can do nothing until they know whether Mitchel would be acceptable as a tenant."

"Yes, yes; they can go on. I shall make no

objection to Mitchel. A respectable man is John Mitchel; very!"

"That's all right then, so far," remarked the lawyer. "At what hour shall I come up with the will? Three o'clock—four o'clock?"

"Any hour. You'll not find me gone out," added Lord Dane with a faint smile.

"Then I'll say three o'clock; and bid your lordship good-day now, hoping my visit has not fatigued you."

He had quitted the room, when Lord Dane's bell rang a hasty peal. It was to recall him.

"Apperly," cried his lordship, "I feel somewhat fatigued; not as well as I did early this morning. I don't think I'll trouble you to come up again to-day."

Some instinct within the lawyer's breast rose against this.

"Is it well to procrastinate, my lord?" he asked. "Won't it be a good thing over, and off your mind?"

"I don't care to be more fatigued to-day than I am," was the reply of Lord Dane. "Come up to-morrow at eleven o'clock. Tell Hawthorne I

should like to see him before he leaves; we shall not meet again in this world."

The lawyer bowed his acquiescence, and went home as fast as his legs could carry him, conscious that many clients must be waiting to see him. Amidst them was John Mitchel.

"Hawthorne and I have come to terms, sir," was his greeting to Mr. Apperly. "We shall want you to make out the agreement and transfer. I don't care how soon it's done."

"All very fine, my good man," returned the lawyer, who, being a lawyer, of course threw difficulties in the way, though none really existed; "but there's a third party to be consulted in this affair, besides you and Hawthorne. And that's Lord Dane."

"I feel sure his lordship will accept me readily," returned Mitchel. "He could not find a surer tenant: you intimated as much yesterday, Mr. Apperly."

"I have nothing to say against you, Mitchel; there's no doubt his lordship might get many a worse. Well, I'll see about it in a few days."

"But, if you could manage it, sir, we should

like the deeds drawn out immediately. I wish to take possession next week, and Hawthorne wants to be rid of it."

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Mr. Apperly, "you can't take a bull by the horns in that way. Some men are six months getting into a house. I am busy to-day, and I shall be busy to-morrow; but you may come in again the next morning. Meanwhile I'll contrive to see Lord Dane."

"I daresay, sir," returned John Mitchel, looking hard at the lawyer, "you might accept me now if you would. It's not altogether that I am in so great a hurry to get into the house; it is Hawthorne who is in haste to get out of it, as you know: but what I want is, to make sure that I shall have it—that I sha'n't be put aside for another. I'd pay this freely to secure it, sir."

He laid down a ten-pound note. Ten-pound notes had charms for Mr. Apperly, as they have for most men, for lawyers in particular, according to popular belief. He looked at it complacently; but, true still to his craft, he would not speak the positive word.

"I have some power vested in me, Mitchel,

certainly ; I believe I can promise that you shall become the tenant. Subject, you understand, to the consent of Lord Dane."

"Of course, Mr. Apperly. Then it is a settled thing ; for I know, his lordship won't object to me. So I'll say good morning, and thank you, sir."

"And step in the day after to-morrow, in the forenoon, Mitchel. Meanwhile I'll be drawing up the necessary papers. As to this," added the lawyer, carelessly popping the note inside his desk, "it can go into the costs."

CHAPTER XI.

UNEXPECTED.

BUT things were not to be quite so smooth and straight as the lawyer assumed. There was to be acting and counter-acting. Somewhere about the same hour that John Mitchel was paying his visit at Mr. Apperly's, Ravensbird paid one at Mr. Geoffrey Dane's. And Mr. Dane's servant looked exceedingly surprised at the presumption.

"Well, he *is* at home," acknowledged the domestic, in answer to the inquiry pressed upon him. "But I shouldn't think he'd see you."

"Suppose you ask him?" rejoined Ravensbird, coolly walking indoors. "Say I have come on business."

The servant might have refused positively in the old days, but his master was a great man now, soon to be the chief of Danesheld, and he did not

dare. "I'll tell Mr. Dane what you say," said he ungraciously.

Herbert Dane—how a first name clings to one's memory!—Geoffry Dane was in the small sitting-room where you once saw him, not enjoying himself now with a cigar and glasses, but seated in a chair doing nothing, his elbow on the table, his face bent upon his hand. He was often so seated now—in the same attitude—as befitted a face in which the lines of some great care were rapidly gathering.

"It's that Ravensbird, sir," said the servant, interrupting his reverie. "He has come into the house as bold as brass, and is asking to see you. On business, he says."

"I'm sure I don't know what business he can have with me," returned Mr. Dane, a shade of annoyance in his tone. "You can send him in, however."

"Sir," began Ravensbird, without any circumlocution, when he entered, "report runs that my Lord Dane leaves many matters of business relating to the estate to you, now you are the heir."

"Well?" said Mr. Dane.

"I have therefore come to ask your interest and influence with his lordship, to get me accepted as tenant of the Sailors' Rest, or to accept me yourself if you have the power."

He spoke fearlessly; not at all as a petitioner, more as though he were making a demand. Ravensbird had always been remarkable for his independence of manner, but since the accusation it had increased fourfold. And it is probable that this helped on the revulsion that was setting-in in his favour: Danesheld could not connect that freedom of bearing with a guilty man.

"What! are you after the Sailors' Rest?" exclaimed Mr. Dane. "I have heard a dozen names mentioned, but not yours."

"I have not been after it with a noise, as the rest have, sir; but as soon as I found it was to be disposed of, I spoke privately to Hawthorne. I must do something for a living; I have been looking out ever since I left the Castle."

"Then you don't intend to go to service again?"

"Service!" returned Ravensbird. "Who

would engage me, after having been taken up on a charge of murdering my former master? There may be some, Mr. Herbert,—I beg your pardon, sir, I ought to say Mr. Dane,—who don't yet believe me innocent. But I never did intend to enter upon another service, if I left Captain Dane's. The Sailors' Rest is just such a house as I should like. Will you help me to it, sir?"

"Ravensbird," said Mr. Dane, not replying to his request, "it appears strange to me that you should remain at Danesheld. You have no ties in it; until you came here with your master, you were a stranger to it: had a like cloud fallen upon me, however unjustly, I should be glad to get away from the place."

"No, sir," answered Ravensbird, in a quietly concentrated tone: "I prefer to stay in it."

"To enter upon the Sailors' Rest will require money," again objected Mr. Dane.

"I am prepared with that. I have not lived to these years without saving money. *That* won't be the bar—as Hawthorne knows. Hawthorne has been playing with me," continued Ravensbird. "I knew of his intention to leave the house sooner

than anyone, and I said at once I would take it off his hands. He quite jumped at it—was all eagerness to transfer it to me; but in a day or two his tone changed, and he has been vacillating between me and John Mitchel.”

“John Mitchel would make an excellent tenant,” remarked Geoffry Dane.

“Not better than I should,” returned Ravensbird. “Hawthorne knows that: but a doubt arose to him whether I should be acceptable to my lord, if he still wavers as to my guilt or innocence; Hawthorne feared it might cause delay, and so went over at once to the enemy, Mitchel.”

“My lord does not waver: he believes you guilty,” was on the tongue of Geoffry Dane; but he checked the words, and suffered Ravensbird to continue.

“It is not likely that Lord Dane can believe me to have been the assailant, in the face of the sworn alibi, though he was prejudiced against me at first; and it was only natural he should be so. Will you accept me as a tenant, Mr. Dane?”

“I have no power to do so: you have taken up a wrong notion altogether. I certainly have

transacted business for my uncle, since I became his presumptive heir; but he has not given me authority to let his houses."

"Will you speak to him for me, sir?"

Mr. Dane hesitated.

"I would speak in a minute, Ravensbird; but I am sure it would be doing no good. Apart from any prejudice, he may or may not hold against you, he is one who will not brook interference, even from me."

"You might *try*," persisted the man, "whatever the result should be."

"Will you undertake not to be disappointed at the result? Did it lie with me, it would be a different matter; but it lies entirely with Lord Dane."

There was a pause. Ravensbird stood in silence, as if still awaiting an answer, his piercing eyes never moving from those of Mr. Dane.

"However, as you seem so set upon it, I will speak to his lordship," resumed the latter. "But I must choose my time: it is not every day that he will allow business matters to be so much as named."

"If it is not settled between now and to-morrow night, John Mitchel will have the place," rejoined Ravensbird.

"Then I will speak to his lordship between now and then," concluded Geoffry Dane.

A few hours subsequent to this, a junket was being held at Dane Castle by the upper servants. The sad events recorded had followed each other in quick succession, and the servants, as in decency bound, had secluded themselves so completely from society, that they were beginning to find the monotony irksome. They were holding, therefore, a quiet *soirée* on their own account, having probably issued invitations for it after the manner of Mr. Weller's friends, the Bath footmen; a quiet little gathering of some half-dozen guests at the most; and the housekeeper's parlour was decorated to receive them; and its table groaned with a tea-feast.

Conspicuous amidst the visitors was Mr. Richard Ravensbird, who had been smuggled in surreptitiously, not to clash with the prejudices of Lord Dane. The servants did not share in those prejudices: they believed his innocence to be an

established fact, and considered him an ill-used man, whom it was their bounden duty to honour. Possibly the eloquent tongue of Mademoiselle Sophie Deffloe had contributed to enhance this state of opinion. Another guest was a lady whom you have had the honour of an introduction to; no other than Miss Eliza Tiffle. It was the aim of Tiffle's life to be "genteel," and she was got up accordingly—a flounced gown of light muslin with primrose bows down it, and primrose streamers to her cap. Lord Dane's valet, an old beau, who had been in search of a wife, as *he* said, for twenty years, and had not found one to his mind yet, was whispering soft speeches into Miss Tiffle's ear, as he plied her with cake and wine and other good things. The tea was over; but a splendid collation of what the housekeeper called "sweets" had replaced it, and Mr. Bruff had been liberal with his wine.

They were talking of no end of things—a very Babel of tongues. Of what concerned themselves and of what didn't, and especially of what concerned their masters and mistresses. The Lady Adelaide's proposed marriage to Squire Lester

was greedily discussed by Tiffle and Sophie—with neither of whom did it appear to stand in any great favour—and Mr. Bruff was eloquent upon the subject of the departure of Hawthorne from Danesheld, and the new tenant that would succeed him at the Sailors' Rest.

"They say it is to be John Mitchel," he observed to Ravensbird.

"Do they?" returned Mr. Ravensbird, in answering remark. But not a word spoke he that he was after it himself.

"Should you not just step through the passage into my lord's room and see whether he is still sleeping?" cried Bruff to the valet, heartlessly interrupting the flirtation between that gentleman and Miss Tiffle.

"My lord is sure to be sleeping," was the reply; "otherwise he'd have rung. He has been uncommonly drowsy all day. Lady Adelaide is sitting in the room. Let me alone for not neglecting my duty, Mr. Bruff."

"My faith!" ejaculated Sophie Deffloe, jumping from her chair by the side of Richard Ravensbird. "If my lady didn't bid me take her a shawl,

for she felt chill, and that's an hour ago! What's my head worth?"

"I wonder the young lady likes to pass her evenings in a sick chamber! I thought to have heard she was not domestical inclined."

The remark was Tiffle's. Sophie had run out of the room to remedy her forgetfulness, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Corbet, a stout lady in a black paramatta gown very much trimmed with crape, took it up.

"She's lonely, poor young lady; and even the company of the sick is better than no company at all. You never saw anybody so changed as she is."

"She's moped to death, that's what it is," said the valet. "Half her time she has not a soul to speak to. I hope your master will soon take her away, Miss Tiffle, for her own sake."

"She's not well either, I'm positive of that," said the housekeeper. "Nobody in health, you know, could feel chilled on these warm nights: and she is always complaining of being cold now. So many deaths have been a great shock for her. First there was the Captain, then Mr. Dane, then—"

The housekeeper's enumeration was cut short.

Sophie Deffloe burst into the midst of them in some great terror, that had taken her breath away and turned her face white.

"Who is in the death-room?" she exclaimed.

"Not anyone," said Mr. Bruff: "the death-room is locked up. Are we going to have some more of your superstitious fancies, Mam'selle Sophie?"

"It is not locked up; the door's open and the key is in it."

"It is locked up, and the key's hanging in my pantry," persisted Bruff.

"Then I tell you it is open—va!" retorted Sophie, stamping her foot. "Have I got the eyes, Mr. Bruff? When I ran by to get the shawl, I think it must have been shut. I did not see, or I never should have had the courage to go by it open; but when I came back, there it was—what you call it?—ajar. I saw the key in the lock, and I saw the flags inside, and I thought I should have dropped."

Mr. Bruff turned into his pantry, muttering that she saw ghosts where none existed, intending to bring the key and confute her. The old valet spoke:

"Did you take the shawl into my lord's room, Ma'mselle Sophie?"

"What should hinder me when I went to do it?" returned the saucy Sophie: and Tiffle peered out at her from between the lids of her little green eyes, and thought how much she should relish the handling of Mademoiselle Sophie and her sauce, when she transferred her abode to the Hall.

"Was my lord asleep?"

"For all I know; I didn't look towards the bed," answered Sophie. "My lady was asleep. She had dozed off, leaning back in the great chair. So I threw the shawl lightly on her knees, and came away."

Bruff returned, with a softened step and a softened voice, his countenance a little perplexed.

"It's very odd," cried he; "the key is *not* in the pantry."

"So! it's Sophie that sees ghosts where there are none, and fancies doors open when they are not, and discovers keys in them that are safe in their pantries," retorted that demoiselle upon Bruff, much aggravated: "perhaps, if you'll walk

as far as the death-room, you'll find that it is open, Mr. Bruff."

"I am going there," said Bruff.

Up started Tiffle, her primrose strings flying; her hands, which were cased elegantly in yellow gloves, clasping each other in simpering entreaty:

"O, Mr. Bruff, if you'd only illow me to accompany you, sir! I have so long wished to get a peep at the death-room of Dane Castle!"

"You are all of you welcome to come if you like," said Bruff to the company generally, as he took up a candle. "It's an empty room; nothing in it to see."

They followed in a body; every one of the strangers; example is contagious. The scared Sophie, possibly feeling herself sufficiently protected when with Mr. Ravensbird, accompanied them. And her assertion was found to be correct—the door was ajar, and the key in it. Bruff inwardly vowed vengeance against the offender when he should pounce upon him; he had little doubt it must be one of the under-servants who had done it in the gratification of curiosity, or to annoy him. Taking the key from the lock into

his safe fingers, he marshalled the company into the room.

"Why it's nothing but a big, square, dreary barn of a place, with nothing in it!" ejaculated Tiffle, forgetting her gentility in her disappointment.

"I told you there was nothing in it," said the butler. "What did you expect to see?"

Perhaps Tiffle had expected to see something in the middle with black velvet over it, for she was looking uncommonly vexed and sour.

"I wouldn't mind going by this here room fifty times over, when the bell was tolling midnight," cried she, with a contemptuous glance at the French girl. "There's nothing here to squawk at. Where does that place lead to?"

"That's a closet," said the butler.

"What's inside of it?" demanded Tiffle.

"A pair of trestles," he replied in a low tone.

"Oh! could we have a look at 'em?"

"No, Mrs. Tiffle," was the grave answer.

"That closet is never opened but when—when it's needful to open it."

"Well, it's a nasty, cold, dismal place, not worth the coming to see," retorted Tiffle. "Where's the

good of having windows that you can't look out of? And how damp the floor is!"

The last remark caused them all to cast their eyes downwards upon the flags. They were damp in places—capriciously damp, one might feel inclined to say; quite wet in parts, quite dry in others.

"What sort of flooring d'ye call this?" inquired Tiffle, when her eyes had taken in the effect. "Some stones give with the damp, and some don't—that is well known; but here the same stone—lots of 'em—is half wet and half dry. And who ever saw flags damp on a hot summer's night, with the weather set in for a regular drought?"

No reply was made to Tiffle. The servants were looking on the floor in ominous dismay, for the superstition relating to it was rife among them.

The butler interposed. "It's nothing new," he said; "it is a state of things common to the flag of which the floor is laid. What were you looking at, Mr. Ravensbird?"

"It's very strange," exclaimed Ravensbird,

who had been most attentively surveying the room in silence, since his entrance: "this place seems quite familiar to me, though I never was in it before. Where, how, and when can I have seen it?"

"In a dream, perhaps," suggested Tiffle. "Odd sights do come to us in dreams."

"Like enough," returned Ravensbird; and the butler turned and looked at him, surprised at the remark from so very matter-of-fact a man.

"As there's nothing particular here to detain us, and the flags may be cold for the ladies' feet, suppose we go back," cried the butler.

They filed out, nothing loth, and hastened along the passage with quick steps, Bruff remaining to lock the door. He had done this, and was putting the key in his pocket, when he was startled at seeing Lady Adelaide coming swiftly towards him. Startled, because it was quite unusual for her to be in that part of the Castle, and because her face was so white and scared. She laid hold of the butler's arm, as if impelled by fear.

"Bruff! Bruff! something is the matter with Lord Dane," she shivered. "He looks—he looks—I don't know how he looks."

"O my lady! you should not have given yourself this trouble. Why did you not ring?"

"I was afraid to remain alone," she whispered. "I dropped asleep, and when I awoke I went to look at Lord Dane, wondering that he had not spoken or called. He was lying with his mouth open, and his face white and cold; its look terrified me."

"Perhaps he has fainted, my lady. He did have fainting-fits at the commencement of his illness."

"Bruff," she gasped, bursting into tears of nervous agitation, "it—looks—like—death. His face looks just as my aunt's looked when she was dead."

Without saying a word to alarm the rest, or call attention to Lady Adelaide, Bruff went to Lord Dane's chamber, the poor terrified girl following close behind him, and absolutely touching his coat for protection. Alas! Bruff soon found what had taken place: Lord Dane had died in his sleep.

Even then, Bruff, who was the very quintessence of quiet order and decorum, made no fuss

to disclose the calamity to the guests. He called away some of the servants, saying Lord Dane was worse, and despatched messengers for all whom it might concern. He could not send for Mr. Lester, because that gentleman was absent that evening from Danesheld.

Mr. Wild, Geoffry Dane, and Mr. Apperly, were soon round the bed. The surgeon said he had been dead more than an hour; considerably more. It made Adelaide shudder: he must have died then before she fell asleep: and she remembered, and an awful remorse sprang up within her at the thought, that she had sat buried in her own reflections until the sleep stole over her, never paying heed to him, never once rising from her chair to look at him. He had died, the doctor thought, in his sleep, without stir or sign; and she was sitting within four yards of him! She stood shivering behind them now, listening to the comments and the sorrow. The household were half petrified: the poor old valet, who was really not very much younger than his master, shedding tears openly.

“Can *nothing* be done to restore him?” he

demanded, with a sob, of Mr. Wild. "To think that this evening, of all evenings, I should not have gone in and out of the chamber every ten minutes, as was my custom!"

"Nothing whatever can be done, I tell you," replied the surgeon. "You may see that for yourselves. One comfort is, he went off quietly, without pain. I have thought this might be the ending."

"Then I wonder you didn't tell him so, Wild," burst forth Mr. Apperly, in a hot tone of reproof. "It was only this very morning his lordship said to me that he was not a subject to go off like the snuff of a candle."

"And why should I tell him? He was prepared for death; he knew it was coming, was very near; wherefore tell him that it might be sudden at the last!"

"No; he was not prepared for death," returned the lawyer, in a heat; "not in one sense. He had not settled his affairs."

The announcement took all by surprise. He, Lord Dane, with his protracted illness, not to have settled his affairs? Geoffry Dane smiled incredulously.

"It's true," said the lawyer. "After he lost wife and sons, his former will was cancelled, and I have been making a fresh one. Upon what chances life's pivots turn!" he broke off. "When I was with Lord Dane this morning, he appointed three o'clock this afternoon for me to bring the will up for execution; then, feeling fatigued, altered it to eleven to-morrow. And now he is gone! and the will is worth so much waste paper."

"Wanting the signature?"

"Wanting the signature," assented Mr. Apperly. "You will be the better for it," he added, looking at Geoffrey Dane.

"No," quietly replied Geoffrey.

They began to leave the chamber for the dining-room, into which it opened. He had died in the lower room: it had been his chamber since his accident. Strangers and guests filed out, with slow, uncertain steps, as if nobody knew exactly what to do next.

"My lord, do you remain in the Castle from now?"

It was the housekeeper who spoke, and they turned and looked at her. At the moment they

thought she was addressing him who lay there—her dead master. But, no: she was speaking to Geoffry, now Lord Dane. He was the new peer: the Right Honourable Geoffry, seventeenth Baron Dane.

“Yes; I suppose so,” he replied. “It may be better that I should.”

But as Lord Dane—we must begin to give him his title, too—spoke, his eye fell on Adelaide: and he recalled his words.

“Not to-night, however, Mrs. Corbet; the hurry is not so great as that. I will see about future arrangements to-morrow.”

“As you please, my lord,” replied Mrs. Corbet.

“Unless you would feel it any protection, my being in the Castle,” he added, approaching Adelaide, and speaking in a low tone. “In that case I will remain.”

“Thank you, O no! not on my account,” she answered, a vivid blush dyeing her pale cheeks. “I shall have the servants.”

“It shall be just as you wish. I will telegraph for Cecilia to-morrow. You may like her to be with you.”

“Thank you,” she repeated again. But both

this answer and the other were given with a mechanical bewildered air, as if she did not know what she said or what she was about.

"I will wish you good-night then, Lady Adelaide."

"Good-night," she rejoined, holding out her hand. "You will—of course—please to—give the orders now."

"Yes, yes," he replied, while her hand was in his. "I will see about everything: no trouble shall fall upon you."

She sat down in a corner behind the screen when he was gone, and burst into a flood of passionate tears. Sophie Deffloe looked round and saw her.

"I'll not stop in the Castle another day, now he is master of it," and her face was a face of flame as she mentally said it. "Were I to be with him again, I might forget my good resolution, and break with George Lester; I might be persuaded to marry him after all, and then—what punishment might not heaven give me for my wickedness? Why did I ever love him? Why can we not forget each other? Where can I go? —O! where can I go?"

As Lord Dane turned out of the Castle gateway, Richard Ravensbird stepped up and accosted him: he appeared to have been lingering on the greensward.

"My lord, I must ask your pardon for interrupting you at this hour. I would say just a word to you on business, if—"

"It is not the hour for it, Ravensbird," said Lord Dane decisively. "I see by your address you know what has occurred."

"I do, my lord; I was in the Castle at the time, spending an hour with the domestics; and very sorry I am that the event should have been so sudden. I always respected Lord Dane."

"The servants have condoned your supposed offence then, though their lord did not," was the answering remark of the new peer.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but condoned is not the proper term," readily returned Ravensbird. "To condone implies that an offence has been committed. I committed none."

"Well, what do you want with me?"

"It is about the lease of the Sailors' Rest. I find that there's not an hour to be lost, if I am

to have it,—not an hour,—or I should not have attempted to speak to your lordship so soon. Mr. Apperly has already begun to draw it up in favour of John Mitchel, subject to the approval of Lord Dane. My lord, *you* are Lord Dane now.”

There was a pointed significance given to the last sentence; a free, independent, almost *demanding* tone, not pleasant to hear. Was it possible that Lord Dane failed to remark it? He did not appear to do so.

“And you think I can grant it to you?”

“I am sure you can, my lord; and I hope you will. Your lordship will find me a good tenant.”

“Enough discussion for to-night, Ravensbird,” curtly responded Lord Dane. “I have already said that it is unseemly.”

Ravensbird respectfully touched his hat and strode away quickly towards Danesheld. Lord Dane proceeded in the same direction, but at a slower pace. He was turning towards his own house when hasty footsteps came up behind him, and he found himself joined by Mr. Apperly, likewise on his way from the Castle.

“A dreadfully sad and sudden event,” cried

the lawyer. "I'm sure your lordship must feel it."

"I do indeed; it has shocked me much," replied Lord Dane, turning upon him his pale face—unnaturally pale it looked in the starlight. "We could not have expected him to be much longer with us; but at least I never anticipated this abrupt termination."

"And to think that he did not sign the will! As I said, it will be all the better for your lordship; but for others—"

"Never mind that to-night, Apperly. I am not quite up to the mark. I loved my poor uncle, perhaps better than anyone else who was left to him," added Lord Dane, his tone one of keen pain.

"Ay; I'm sure you did. When shall I meet your lordship for business? There are some things which must be seen to at once."

"You can meet me at the Castle to-morrow; I shall be there by ten o'clock. And meanwhile, Apperly, until I shall have looked into affairs, let any little business matters you may have on hand rest in abeyance—granting leases and things of that sort."

"Very good, my lord. But there's nothing much in hand just now, except the transfer of Hawthorne's lease to Mitchel. They both want it got over sooner than pen can be put to parchment. The one wants to be off and away; the other thinks he's not sure of it till the lease is actually signed. I suppose I may go on with that?"

"No," said his lordship; "neither with that nor with anything else."

"But"—and the lawyer spoke as if taken by surprise—"Lord Dane had no objection to Mitchel as a tenant; he told me so this morning. I presume your lordship will have none."

"Lord Dane's death puts a stop to all such negotiations for the present," was the decisive and somewhat sharply-delivered answer. "Let them remain, I say, in abeyance."

Mr. Apperly nodded acquiescence and said adieu to the new peer, breaking out into a little explosion as he went on down the road.

"He'll be a martinet, as sure as a gun! We might almost as well have had the dead heir to reign here, the Honourable Geoffry. It's often the way with these unexpectedly-raised men."

The new peer went home, and retired at once to his chamber. But instead of getting to bed, as is the custom with ordinary folk, he paced his room until morning light.

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET'S CUP PRETTY FULL.

MR. LESTER returned home late, and was greeted by Tiffle with the news—Lord Dane was dead. He could not go to the castle that night; it had struck eleven; but he was there betimes on the following morning. It was nearly mid-day before he saw Lady Adelaide. She came to him with her hands stretched out, her eyes wild, her cheeks of a crimson hectic.

“Take me away, Mr. Lester; O, take me away! I will not remain here, the guest of Geoffry Dane.”

Taken by surprise though he was, Mr. Lester was only too willing to echo her words. Indeed he had been weighing possibilities in his mind all the morning, and he ventured to speak of one:

That she would marry him quietly and private-

ly that day in the Castle, and come at once to his house.

The proposal startled her to tremor. She shrank from it aghast; and Mr. Lester saw it with pain. What else, then, he inquired: any plan that she might suggest for her own comfort, he would help her to carry out.

What else, indeed! What other plan was there that could be suggested? She was fully determined—obstinately bent, some might have called it—not to remain another night in the Castle: although Lord Dane had telegraphed for his sister with morning light. Mr. Lester rather wondered whence her wish for hurry might proceed: he never gave a thought, unconscious man, that she feared companionship with the new peer might peril her promise to him.

In her dilemma, in her difficulty of devising any impromptu home for herself, she gave some sign of relenting. Sophie Deffloe, happily or unhappily, suggested Mrs. Grant's; and that finished the contest. With a half cry, Lady Adelaide said she would not, could not go to Scotland; and Mr. Lester came again to the rescue, urging his

suit by all the persuasive eloquence of which he was master. He reminded her that there would be no difficulty whatever in carrying out the arrangements with complete privacy; a special license was already in his possession, which allowed of the ceremony being performed in the Castle, and he begged her to bear in mind the fact that her uncle, Lord Dane, had himself urged their speedy union.

"It will look so, to be married while he lies dead in the house!" she said, with pouting lips. "What will the world say at our running away on a wedding tour, leaving him before he is buried?"

"But I am not asking you to do that," said Mr. Lester. "I only say leave this home for mine. You shall remain there in privacy for a few days, and after the funeral I will take you anywhere that you may wish to go. You might, indeed, come to me as a visitor if you very much preferred it; Miss Bordillion is there, you know; but I think, Adelaide, this would not be so pleasant for you; I think you would prefer to enter the Hall at once as its mistress."

"Yes; if I come," she answered.

There is no need to pursue the argument. It is sufficient to say that Mr. Lester obtained her consent; and he went forth to make the different arrangements.

Scarcely knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels, he halted outside the Castle. The Hall must be warned and proper preparations made for the reception of this unexpected bride; the clergyman must be spoken to: which should he go to first? He dashed off to the clergyman's, whose house was at the other extremity of Danesheld: and, as it happened, he chose the wrong, whereby ensued some complication.

The Reverend Mr. James was out somewhere in the parish: he would be in directly to his two o'clock dinner. Leaving word that he would call again, Squire Lester bent his hasty steps to his own home.

Which seemed deserted. There was no echo of children's voices to be heard; there was no sign of living creatures to be seen. The remains of a repast, laid in the dining-room, alone greeted Mr. Lester. He rang a peal, in his impatience, that echoed through the house, and Jones came in.

"Where's Miss Bordillion?"

"She's gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"She's gone to Great Cross, sir, with Master Lester and the young ladies. They have been having dinner now, and will be home to a late tea."

Mr Lester broke out with an impatient word. Great Cross was a large town some ten miles off by rail. How could proper arrangements be carried out for the hasty reception of his wife at the Hall, in the absence of its present mistress? There were five hundred things on which he wanted to consult Miss Bordillion.

"What on earth took her off to Great Cross to-day?" he exclaimed in his vexation.

"Well, sir," said Jones, who, if he ever condescended to a gossip with any one it was with his master, "I think she's chiefly gone to buy a doll for Miss Lester. Master Wilfred poked out the eyes of the old one yesterday and melted its wax nose off. Miss Maria cried so that Miss Bordillion promised to buy her one to replace it."

"A new doll, indeed!" retorted Mr. Lester;

"she's getting too old for dolls. They have no business to go off in this manner for a day without consulting me."

"I heard Miss Bordillion remark to the children, sir, that she was sorry you went out so early this morning, before she could see you. If you had been home a quarter of an hour earlier now, sir, you'd have seen them, for they have not long gone."

"In that wretched omnibus, I suppose."

"No, sir, Master Wilfred's driving them in the pony carriage. They were going by the half-past two train."

Mr. Lester pulled out his watch. Ten minutes past two. There would not be time for him to overtake them; though he might have done it had his horse been ready. The railway station was three miles off, and a public omnibus conveyed Danesheld passengers to and fro.

"What are they going to do with the pony carriage?" he rejoined, quite savagely: "leave it in the road?"

"Robert went over by the omnibus, sir, to be in readiness to bring it back," answered Jones,

wondering much what could have gone wrong with his even-tempered master.

Mr. Lester really was in a dilemma. It was an unusual position : the having to tell a household that he was about to bring a bride home that day, and things must be in suitable readiness to receive her. In his nature there was a sort of shy reticence which rather held him back from speaking ; he knew nothing whatever about household arrangements, and would have preferred to turn over the whole thing to Miss Bordillion, rather than have to settle matters himself with his gaping and commenting servants. And besides—and here lay the gist of the whole—he *owed* it to Miss Bordillion to make her acquainted with it at once. Short enough in any case would the notice have been, and he had an instinctive feeling that she would turn restive at the sudden invasion.

“Will you take any luncheon, sir?”

“Send Tiffle here,” said Mr Lester, allowing the question to remain in abeyance. But luncheon was a meal he rarely took.

Tiffle came in ; her white muslin apron on her hands, while she waited for orders, smoothing

themselves one over the other—as poor Hood, who went from us too early, had it — “washing his hands with invisible soap and imperceptible water.” Tiffle seemed to be always doing the same.

She waited, but no words came from Mr. Lester. He was thinking how much he should say and how much he should not.

“Did you please to want me, sir?”

Mr. Lester spoke then rather obscurely; giving the woman a hint of the case, and that such and such a possibility might occur. Many maid-servants would not have understood him in his enigmatical language; but Tiffle's intelligence was of the sharp order.

“Rooms to be made ready for any contingency; Mr. Lester's own rooms; certainly, they should be set about at once. Should things be replaced as they were in the late Mrs. Lester's time? should the pink silk toilette draperies be——”

Mr. Lester lifted his hand in reproof. He did not want to be questioned about details of which he knew nothing. Tiffle, in the absence of Miss Bordillion, must take everything upon herself and exercise her own judgment.

"It was very good," Tiffle answered. "Would dinner be required?"

But this, Mr. Lester was really unable to say. He supposed it would be: he would endeavour to send word to Tiffle later, and the hour. And she was to keep a silent tongue in her head, and not talk in the household.

He went up to his rooms, looking about him there, and putting aside various odds and ends of his own that were strewed about. A table in the room called his dressing-room, but which he had not used as one of late years, but as a smoking-room if anything, had some bundles of papers on it, letters, and other things; these he glanced over, threw some on the floor to be taken away, and the rest he locked up. It smelt of smoke, and he put the two windows down as far as they would go, and propped the door open. At length he took his departure, and sped back to the clergyman's.

It struck three. He had not thought it so late, and went along at the pace of a steam-engine. Thinking of steam-engines, Mr. Lester turned his head in the direction of the far-off railway, wondering when it would be extended to Danesheld.

But Danesheld, in the opinion of powers there, was altogether too small and primitive corner of the land to need an extension. Mr. Lester was wishing *he* was one of the powers as he came to the clergyman's gate, and walked up the narrow garden path.

"Is Mr. James come in?"

"He has been in, sir, and is gone again" was the answer of the servant, who stood with the door in her hand.

"Been in and gone again!" echoed Mr. Lester.

"He came in, sir, not five minutes after you were here, and called out to me that he must have his dinner directly. So I served it, and don't think he was ten minutes over it before he was out again."

"Did you give him my message?" inquired Mr. Lester.

"Yes, sir, I said you wanted him upon business of very great importance; he replied that he was obliged to go out, but he'd be back again as soon as he could."

Mr. Lester looked around him in blank con-

sternation. Any hitch in the preliminaries, and Lady Adelaide might waver in her bargain, for she was capricious as the wind; not to call her his own that day, now that the cup of bliss had been brought so near him, Mr. Lester would have thought the greatest misfortune in life. If he had gone to his own home in the first instance and come here afterwards, he might have caught both Miss Bordillion and Mr. James. Did he know where to look for the reverend man, he would start off now in pursuit; but Danesheld was a tolerably large parish, taking in the rural portion of it, and a very straggling one. Leaving a few pencilled words for Mr. James, he walked away towards the castle.

The news on his arrival there both soothed and irritated him. Lady Adelaide was dressing for the ceremony. All very well, so far; but what if that clergyman did not make his appearance? Mr. Lester was as a man upon thorns. He saw Lord Dane and asked if he would give Lady Adelaide away. Very quiet was the reply, but it was in the negative; Lord Dane had business elsewhere; and a suspicion arose to Mr.

Lester that the new peer was resenting the young lady's hasty departure as a slight upon himself.

It was past six when Mr. Lester again went home. He made some alteration in his dress, and snatched a mouthful of food as a substitute for dinner, for Lady Adelaide had declined to dine on her arrival. The clergyman had not yet turned up, and Mr. Lester was in a fever. He had been down again to the parsonage now; the servant said her master's tea was waiting for him, and he was sure not to be long.

What about Miss Bordillion? Mr. Lester had been in hopes that she also would be at home, but she was not. He sat down and wrote a note to her, telling Tiffle to give it her as soon as she came in. He then ordered his close-carriage and went back in it to the Castle. The clergyman was not come, and he sent the carriage down to the parsonage to wait for him.

As Mr. Lester entered the great hall which had been hastily prepared for the ceremony, the late Lord Dane's official table serving for a temporary altar, covered with a gorgeous cloth—who should come fluttering up to him but Cecilia

Dane. Lord Dane, as good as his word, had telegraphed for her early in the morning; and what with the hurried journey, and what with the news that greeted her, Miss Dane was more of a child than usual, and began asking him whether she could stand by Lady Adelaide at that altar in her heavy black gown, and whether there was time for her to go home and change it for a white one. Mr. Lester put her aside with a good-humoured word, as he went in search of one nearer and dearer. Black or white, what mattered such surroundings, only let that other one become his! There was a feeling on Mr. Lester, and had been all the day, that she might slip through his fingers yet: there always is a fear of the sort, more or less, in regard to anything desired with intensity, when the time of fruition is at hand. And the evening sped on.

It was getting on for ten o'clock, and Miss Bordillion was seated in an easy-chair in the handsome drawing-room at the Hall. She and her charges had come home late, past eight, and glad enough she was, when tea was over, to despatch them to bed and be at rest. Even Winifred

was tired, and had made no demands to sit up later, as he generally did. Somewhat to her surprise, as she thus sat, the servant came in and began to light the large middle chandelier, which was not done in general.

"Why are you lighting that, Jones?"

"Tiffle sent me to do it, ma'am. She thought she heard the carriage coming down the road."

"Is Mr. Lester out in the carriage to-night?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But why need you light the chandelier? There's enough light in the room without it."

Jones could only repeat that he was doing it by Tiffle's orders. The man had not been made a confidant of by Tiffle, who had kept her information close. He knew there had been some unusual stir going on in the house, but never gave a thought to the real facts.

The carriage was Mr. Lester's. It came round to the front slowly, and Jones, his lighting finished, hastened out. Another minute and Mr. Lester came in, Lady Adelaide on his arm.

Had Miss Bordillon seen an apparition enter, she could not have been more startled with aston-

ishment. Lady Adelaide threw a rich cloak from her white shoulders as she came in, and stood revealed in her evening attire; a white silk robe adorned with costly lace, a pearl necklace, pearl bracelets, and white gloves. A small wreath was round her hair behind, from which fell a veil that looked very like a bridal one. Had Miss Bordillion entertained any suspicion of the truth, and looked closely, she might have seen that the wreath was composed of orange blossoms. But she was too bewildered to look or to think; and stood with a petrified stare. What should bring Lady Adelaide to the Hall at this hour? What should have caused her to deck herself out in that guise, with her uncle lying dead?

“How do you do, Miss Bordillion? It is scarcely fair to take the house by storm in this way, is it; but I believe there was no help for it.”

She advanced as she held out her hand, and it brought her under the blaze of light. Never had she looked more beautiful. Margaret Bordillion mechanically touched the offered hand, and glanced to Mr. Lester for an explanation, which

he did not seem to see. He was looking at Lady Adelaide.

"Is tea ready, do you know, Margaret? You would like some at once, would you not, Adelaide?"

"O, yes."

Never had Margaret Bordillion been so scared out of her self-possession. Muttering some half-intelligible words about "telling the servants to bring it in," she escaped from the room. Ere she had gone half-way across the hall, she remembered that the children had left some toys on the sofa near the door, not particularly ornamental to a drawing-room, and she turned back to get them.

She opened the door softly, not caring that they should notice her re-entrance, intending to scramble up the things and escape again. Better that she had not gone back! Mr. Lester stood with his back to her; he had gathered that fair girl in his arms, and was whispering words of welcome with his eyes and lips. Margaret left the toys and went out again, a dim suspicion, not of the truth, but of something like it, beginning to beat upon her brain.

At the foot of the stairs she encountered Tiffle and Sophie Deffloe. The latter was without her bonnet, and looked as much at home as if she had lived in the Hall for a year. Tiffle was gorgeous in a stiffened-out old purple silk gown, and white bows in her cap.

"I've been showing mem'zel her lady's rooms," said Tiffle, her green eyes turned stealthily on Miss Bordillion's changing face; "leastways master's rooms, which is the same thing now. But the luggage ain't come down yet from the Castle, and mem'zel can't unpack."

"Has Lady Adelaide Errol come to remain the night?" inquired Margaret, more bewildered, more at sea than ever. "Here, in Mr. Lester's house?"

"My lady's come for good, ma'am; come home," responded Tiffle, winking and blinking as if the light of the hall lamp dazzled her eyes, though in reality never taking them from the face of Miss Bordillion. "She and master have just been married, and he has brought her home. Didn't the note he left explain—Goodness me!" broke off Tiffle, diving into her pocket for the note,

"to think that I should have forgot to give you this, ma'am! I'm sure I beg ten thousand pardens! Mr. Lester wrote it when he was at home this afternoon, and charged me to give it you myself, and I put it in my pocket for safety. Out of sight, out of mind!"

She had kept it there purposely, and she knew it. Margaret did not faint: she only leaned against the wall for a moment's support; her face was growing quite ghastly, but she strove to carry it all off with an easy hand, and her poor dry lips parted with a faint smile as she turned to Sophie.

"Married! Indeed?"

"But I surely thought it never would have got done to-night, miss," spoke up that self-possessed and voluble demoiselle. "My young lady has been sitting dressed since this afternoon, and the curé—the what you call parson—could not be found. It was nine o'clock when he came, and we had nearly given him up. They were married in the great salon, the hall; and Miss Dane, she was girl of honour in a black robe. It was bad luck that, and I said so; but they'd not listen. My lady's dress was all right; it was a new one

made for her just before these troubles, and she had never worn it ; and I went out and succeeded to get the veil and the flowers in Danesheld."

Margaret Bordillion had heard enough. Tiffle began to tell of the confidence her master had reposed in her, and the scuffle it had put her and the housemaids in ; but she succeeded in getting by them, and went up the stairs. The doors of Mr. Lester's rooms were open, and a flood of light came forth from them into the corridor. Margaret leaned her aching head against the wall, and opened the letter.

It contained but a few brief lines ; explaining to her what was in contemplation, and the reasons for the haste—that Lady Adelaide had no other home to go to, and wished to leave at once the Castle, of which the new peer had taken possession. The words were penned with the utmost kindness, almost tenderness ; and she stood looking at them she knew not how long, her sight dimmed by misery.

"Margaret."

The call startled her, for it was Mr. Lester's. Crushing the note into her pocket, and passing

her hand across her eyes and brow, she moved to the head of the staircase and answered it.

"Yes."

"Do come down and make tea, Margaret," he said, running lightly up. "Poor Adelaide feels shy and strange; it is only natural she should, coming thus suddenly amidst us all. It is quite an exceptional case, you see."

"I—I cannot," gasped Margaret. "Indeed I cannot."

Mr. Lester took one of the trembling hands in his, and laid the other gently on her shoulder.

"Margaret, forgive me. I see that this is an awful blow to you, and can discern its source. You are thinking of the slight on poor Katherine. The feeling may be a just one; but remember she is gone. Do not—do not let it prejudice you against my young wife, whom I have just sworn to love and cherish. Come down to her in your woman's pity."

Thinking of Katherine! Well, better that he should have taken up the notion. Almost unconscious what she did, she yielded mechanically to

his hand, which grasped her's tightly, and drew her gently after him.

"I did not know of it," she said. "Tiffle never gave me the note you left. Of course you took me by surprise."

"Tiffle's a fool for her pains then," returned Mr. Lester.

The tea-things were in the drawing-room then, and Sophie was taking off her lady's veil. Adelaide turned to Miss Bordillion.

"It was in my way when I sat down," she said, in a tone that sounded something like an apology. "It is a large one."

"You'll not have the wreath off as well, my lady," asked Sophie.

"Of course not. That does not trouble me."

Sophie retired, folding up the veil, and Lady Adelaide came and sat at the table by Miss Bordillion. With an action that seemed like the petulance of a spoiled child, she took her gloves off, and flung them on the table. It left the wedding ring conspicuous: she wore no other.

"I wonder how long it will be before I get

used to the sight of it?" she said, glancing at Mr. Lester.

He only smiled in answer. Margaret was already making the tea. But how she got through the evening—and got through it with a calm exterior—she does not know to this hour.

The next day she encountered them both: not by her own wish; in express opposition to it. She remained in her own sitting-room all the morning, keeping the children with her, except rebellious Wilfred, who was off, she knew not whither. After their morning lessons were over, they went out to play, Margaret with them. The fresh air might be a change for her fainting spirit. "Come quietly this way," she whispered; and took them down the back stairs, and out at the back door, avoiding the ordinary route of exit in her nervous dread of seeing Mr. Lester and his wife.

They went to what was called "Mrs. Lester's garden," a square piece of ground, close to the house, but well sheltered in from view by its encompassing trees and shrubs. Here Margaret sat down on an ornamental bench, and the two girls did what they chose. Both were very *young*

children for their age ; or, it may rather be said, for the present age. They were thoroughly natural, simple, unartificial : a few such, let us say it in gratitude, are to be met with still, who are not premature women before their time. Maria had her doll's perambulator ; the new doll, bought yesterday at Great Cross, was seated in it in state : a wondrously beautiful doll, as large as a baby, with blue eyes and flaxen hair, not unlike the new stepmother Maria had yet to see. Strange as it may seem, Lady Adelaide Errol and Mr. Lester's children had not met, although she had been so long at Dane Castle. But Mr. Lester was not one who liked to take his children abroad with him, or to allow them to appear when he had guests at home.

A sudden noise caused Miss Bordillion to look up. Wilfred had appeared on the scene, was making a raid on the new doll, and the little girls began to scream simultaneously. Margaret, anxious to avoid noise to-day, went towards them to quell the disturbance by her authority, and found Master Wilfred holding the doll head downwards above their reach, and enjoying the consequent distress.

But the noise subsided before she was quite up with them: the little girls ceased screaming and stood quiet; Wilfred, with a pleasant laugh, put the outraged doll back in its carriage; and Miss Bordillion found herself face to face with Lady Adelaide Lester.

"I think I have lost my way," she said, with a smile, holding out her hand in greeting to Miss Bordillion. "Mr. Lester came out with me, but he stayed to speak to some man, and I walked on. Are you quite well this morning?"

"Quite well," murmured Margaret, whose colour went and came in a degree that caught the observation of Master Wilfred, absorbed though he was. The boy had propped his back against a tree, and was staring at his new stepmother. She had resumed her deep mourning to-day, and wore a black burnous cloak of some thin material, with silken tassels; but there was nothing on her head except the mass of bright flaxen hair, of the same colour as Maria's doll.

"And now I must know which is which," she said, with a smile at the two children. "This is Maria," she continued, pointing to Edith.

There was a laugh. Maria blushed and said no, she was Maria. Lady Adelaide looked at her for a minute, more critically than kindly.

"She's not like Mr. Lester."

"She's like our dead mamma," put in Wilfred; "only prettier."

Lady Adelaide turned upon him. "You are like Mr. Lester," she said. "I should have known you anywhere for his son. How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"Fourteen! I had no idea the children were so old," she murmured, half to herself. "I don't think I ever asked, though. Is he always at home?" she added, looking at Miss Bordillion.

"Only in the holidays, in general. This time it is an exceptional case. He is at Rugby. Sickness broke out in the school, and the boys were sent home."

"I shall not trouble you, Lady Adelaide," put in the boy, "if you are afraid of that. I can keep myself out of your way."

She looked gravely at him, as if she were considering the words. In reality she was regarding the marvellous beauty of his face, of

his blue eyes. Wilfred, of a touchy nature, hot-tempered and proud, thought she did not believe in his assurance. It may be that the boy in his heart was resenting his father's second marriage just as keenly as was Miss Bordillion.

"Shall I take an oath to do it, Lady Adelaide? I will if you like."

What could have caused the words so to tell upon her? Her face became hot and cold, as one in mortal terror; and she looked from him to Miss Bordillion; from Miss Bordillion to him back again: a stealthy look of fear, it was, at best.

"Why do you say that to me?"

"I thought you seemed to doubt me," returned Wilfred, who was regarding his new stepmother just as keenly as she was regarding him. "I don't suppose you'll have anything at all to do with us; Miss Bordillion sees to Maria."

Lady Adelaide turned away with a laugh, and held out her hand to the little girls, "Which of you will show me the way to the roseroy?" she asked. "Mr. Lester was going to take me

to it, but I suppose I have caused him to miss me, through turning in here."

They both responded to the challenge and ran forward with her. Wilfred Lester followed them with his eyes.

"I don't like her at all, Margaret. She's not kind."

"Hush, Wilfred. You cannot judge what she is, or tell whether you will like her or not, until you shall have seen more of her."

"Can't I," answered the bold boy, "we shall all see if we live long enough. Good-day to you, Margaret, I'm going for a sail with old Bill Gand."

As he vaulted away in one direction Mr. Lester appeared in another, looking for his wife. With almost feverish nervousness, as though she feared the moment for speaking would be lost, Margaret Bordillion went up and accosted him. She had lain awake the whole of the previous night, thinking of her plans, and she hastened to unfold them.

With rapid, eager utterance,—with words that

were utterly unlike the usually calm tones of Miss Bordillion,—with lips that paled and faltered, and had to be bitten into life, she poured forth her wish; nay, her prayer. She would hire of him that small house of his that was vacant, Cliff Cottage, if he would accept her as a tenant; there she would live and keep Edith with her and educate her; she had been thinking that perhaps Mr. Lester would allow her to have Maria.

Mr. Lester for answer burst out laughing.

“How can you be so foolish, Margaret? Cliff Cottage? Why it's not large enough to swing a cat in. And where's your income to come from to keep it up?”

“I have a hundred a year of my own, as you know. And the money that Major Bordillion intended to pay with Edith at a first-class school can be paid to me instead, if I educate her. Perhaps you will also pay me with Maria?”

“Well, you have settled it nicely! What on earth is running in your head, Margaret?”

“You will not want any of us now: you have your wife. Wilfred is the greater part of his

time at school; Maria will be better with me than at home. As you once observed, Lady Adelaide possesses neither the age nor the experience to take upon herself so great a tie, even if she had the inclination."

"But what I want to know is, why you need leave us?" rejoined Mr. Lester. "You can be just as comfortable here as you have been. The house——"

"It could not be; it could not be," she interrupted, in unmistakable tremor. Mr. Lester regarded her with surprise.

"Margaret, why?" he asked, after a pause. "That you have some powerful motive for this proposed flight from the Hall, I can see. Will you not tell me what it is?"

Tell him what it was! The painful crimson suffused her face and then left it pale as marble. Did he suspect the truth then, as he gazed upon her emotion? It cannot be said; Margaret never knew, then or afterwards; he gave no sign, save that an answering flush rose to his own brow and dyed it red.

"You shall have Cliff Cottage if you wish it so very much," he said, gently. "But as Maria—we will talk of that later."

She bowed her head. And Mr. Lester turned away abruptly, and went in search of the Lady Adelaide.

END OF VOL. I.

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